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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 12 to 28 resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 29 to 37 answered orally.

Air Quality

38. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to improve Ireland's air quality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13893/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): While Ireland's air quality is generally good and compares favourably with many of our European colleagues, we cannot afford to be complacent in this area. Recent research shows that air pollution has more damaging impacts on human health at lower levels than was previously understood. In our small country alone, premature mortality from air pollution is estimated at four people per day.

With this in mind, I am engaged in progressing a range of measures to safeguard and improve our air quality. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, I launched a public consultation paper earlier this month with a view to producing the first ever National Clean Air Strategy. The consultation is open until 28 April and I look forward to receiving a broad range of submissions and views. The Clean Air Strategy, which I intend to finalise this year, will provide the strategic framework for a set of cross-Government policies and actions to reduce harmful emissions, and consequential health impacts, by improving our air quality. The strategy will address a wide range of national policies that are relevant to air quality such as residential solid fuel, transport, energy, and agriculture. My officials have already engaged in preliminary discussions on the proposed Strategy with relevant Government Departments and other stakeholders.

In parallel with the Strategy, I am providing additional resources to support the Environmental Protection Agency in their plans to improve the air quality monitoring network in Ireland. The extra resources will enable the EPA to double the number of monitoring stations in the country, and provide extra support to local authorities in developing new capabilities and capacities in air quality monitoring.

Questions Nos. 39 and 40 answered orally.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 34.

Waste Tyre Disposal

42. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the tyre industry regarding the monopoly on collection and recycling and the issue of excessive costs. [13887/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am introducing a new compliance scheme that will effectively manage waste tyres in the Irish market and will reduce the stockpiles of waste tyres, which could have a detrimental effect on the environment and human health.

I am very aware of the concerns of the tyre industry regarding these new structures. I have met with the tyre representative bodies. I listened to their concerns and I have done my best to address as many of them as possible.

The scheme will be operated by Repak End of Life Tyres (ELT), with a registration and reporting role for the Producer Register Limited. It will carry out all regulatory functions on behalf of its members. It will be funded by a visible Environmental Management Charge (vEMC). All operators will be obliged to provide data on the numbers of tyres coming on and off the market. This will be the first time that there will be clarity in this regard. It will be mandatory for anyone placing tyres on the market in Ireland to join the compliance scheme.

There is nothing unusual about the designation of a single compliance scheme for a particular waste stream. A comprehensive review of compliance schemes in Ireland in 2014 examined this aspect and recommended that the tyre market in Ireland is such that only one Producer Organisation would be viable. This single compliance model already works in other waste streams for example, farm plastics (IFFPG) and packaging (Repak).

The vEMC will be set at a level to enable the scheme operate on a not for profit basis while ensuring they manage the regulatory obligations of their members. Should it become apparent to me that the charge is insufficient to cover or is exceeding the cost of managing tyres in an environmentally sound manner, I will amend the charge accordingly.

National Broadband Plan

43. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to tackle broadband deficits in blackspots such as Legan and Ardagh, County Longford, in the period while the national broadband plan is out to tender and before it is implemented, in view of the damage this deficit is causing to local businesses on an ongoing basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13184/17]

68. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is engaging with the private sector adequately to ensure accessibility to broadband coverage in south County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13696/17]

72. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the implementation of the Dáil Éireann approved Private Members' business motion on rural broadband of July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13883/17]

79. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the implementation of the national broadband plan in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13936/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43, 68, 72 and 79 together.

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

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

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

There are circa 88,000 premises in County Kildare, approximately 20,000 (23%) of which are located in the Amber area on the Map, and will benefit from the NBP's State Intervention. The remaining c.68,000 (77%) premises are located in the commercial blue area and will be served by commercial operators.

My Department is actively monitoring commercial deployment plans in the BLUE areas to ensure that all households and businesses can get access to the services. My Department is also actively monitoring developments of commercial operators that might impact the Intervention Area. This is being done in accordance with procedures set out by my Department in December 2015.

I should add, however, that the provision of telecommunications services, including broadband services, is a matter for the service providers concerned who operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent regulator, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). I do not have a statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services to particular locations.

The map indicates that the townlands of Legan and Ardagh Demesne County Longford are within the AMBER area and will, therefore, be included in the State Intervention procure-

ment process under the NBP.

Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

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. 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.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded.

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 and a prioritisation programme will be put in place in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Two Regional Action Groups have been established to work with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate broadband rollout in rural Ireland.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce has moved to the Implementation phase. The Implementation Programme on Mobile Phone and Broadband Access identifies 19 of the 40 Taskforce actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Government Departments and State Agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. Each of the actions and Implementation Programme has its own timeframe for delivery, see Report: 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 the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

I am satisfied that the combination of initiatives, and the procurement process to deliver a new high speed broadband network under the NBP, will put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity, and ensure that high speed broadband services are universally available.

Energy Policy

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his plans have progressed to develop the alternative energy sector in view of international trends and the extent to which dependency on imported fuels is likely to increase in the absence of a robust non fossil fuel sector; the degree to which reliance on foreign imports and costs associated therewith can be reduced significantly in the next ten years by way of the development of all viable alternatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13925/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced electricity to all consumers. The Energy White Paper, published in December 2015, sets out a high-level framework for Ireland's energy transition to a low carbon economy and society and identifies a range of measures and actions to support this aim.

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has calculated that 25.3% of electricity, 6.5% of heat and 5.7% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2015. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 9.1% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2015 were met from renewable sources and that this avoided €286 million of fossil fuel imports. Provisional data for 2016 from SEAI shows that 27.3% of electricity demand was met from renewable sources.

The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and although good progress towards the target has been made to date, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and a new Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, designed to assist in meeting our RES-E and RES-H targets. The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

In the transport sector, Ireland aims to meet its renewable target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles also making a small contribution. Further increases to the obligation rate in the Biofuels Obligation Scheme took effect from 1 January 2017 when the rate increased to 8% by volume.

The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, which is underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, provides the high-level policy direction for the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. The development of sectoral mitigation measures for the electricity generation, the built environment, transport and agriculture sectors to be set out in a National Mitigation Plan (NMP) is well advanced. The primary objective of the first NMP will be to monitor measures already underway and identify potential additional measures that, in the medium to longer term, will reduce GHG emissions. This will assist Ireland to achieve our national transition objective to become a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of 2050. Following a public consultation launched last week, the NMP will be submitted to Government for approval in June.

Recreational Angling Sector

45. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for further funding in 2017 to develop and enhance infrastructure associated with angling (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13689/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): My Department provided €500,000 in funding support for the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) in 2016 and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) reviewed applications in respect of a first call for projects based on this funding. I announced approval for the first €500,000 of investment for 50 community-based projects nationwide in December last.

I have also secured an additional €1.5 million for NSAD investment for this year and further tranches of project funding will be announced in 2017.

In addition, IFI secured funding of €536,000 from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under the Action Plan for Rural Development, with which the NSAD is aligned.

The NSAD is the first comprehensive national framework for the development of Ireland's angling resource. The NSAD has the potential to deliver considerable benefits in terms of employment, tourism and health and wellbeing, particularly in rural areas. Effective and sustainable implementation of the NSAD, delivered together with local and national stakeholders, will ensure stability of existing jobs and businesses reliant on angling, and the creation of new jobs as the economic impact of angling grows. The NSAD aims to develop our angling resource sustainably through balancing the economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects of any development in line with Inland Fisheries Ireland's responsibilities for the protection, management, conservation and development of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources.

Earnáil na Slatiascaireachta.

46. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brendan Griffin** den Aire Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide agus Comhshaoil an mbeidh maoiniú breise ar fáil faoin gciste caipitil Oibreacha um Fhorbairt na Slatiascaireachta cosúil leis an maoiniú a leithdháil a Roinn i gcomhar le hIascach Intíre Éireann an Nollaig seo caite; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [13944/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Cuireann an earnáil slatiascaireachta €836 milliún le geilleagar na hÉireann gach bliain agus tacaíonn sí le 11,000 post Éireannach. Is minic gur i bpobail tuaithe agus imeallacha a bhíonn na poist seo, áit a mbíonn níos lú deiseanna fostaíochta ar fáil.

Tá sé mar aidhm ag an Straitéis Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Slatiascaireachta (SNFS) an méid a chuireann an tslatiascaireacht leis an ngeilleagar a mhéadú go €932 milliún in aghaidh na bliana agus 1,800 post breise a chur ar fáil. Tá Iascach Intíre Éireann ag fiosrú na bhfoinsí maoiniúcháin ar fad a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ann.

Chuir mo Roinn €500,000 de thacaíocht mhaoiniúcháin ar fáil don SNFS in 2016 agus mheas Iascach Intíre Éireann iarratais le haghaidh tionscadail. D'fhógair mé i mí na Nollag seo caite go raibh an chéad €500,000 d'infheistíocht le haghaidh 50 tionscadal pobalbhunaithe ar fud na tíre ceadaithe.

Chomh maith leis sin, tá €1.5 milliún breise faighte agam le haghaidh infheistíocht ag an

SNFS i mbliana agus fógrófar tuilleadh sciartha de mhaoiniú le haghaidh tionscadal in 2017.

Ina theannta sin, tá maoiniú €536,000 faighte ag Iascach Intíre Éireann ón Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta faoin bPlean Gníomhaíochta um Fhorbairt Tuaithe, a bhfuil an SNFS ina chuid de.

Wind Energy Guidelines

47. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the discussions he has had with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on new planning guidelines for wind turbines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13895/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set legally binding renewable energy targets for member states and Ireland is committed to meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources by 2020. As the most cost effective of the technologies available to Ireland and in keeping with the overarching objective of the Government's energy policy, to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers, wind energy will make the largest contribution to our renewable energy target. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, in consultation with my Department is conducting a targeted review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (WEDGs) in relation to noise, shadow flicker and proximity. In accordance with the Programme for Government commitment the finalised Guidelines will have to offer a better balance between the concerns of local communities and the need to invest in indigenous energy projects. The new planning guidelines will also be informed by best international practice. Minister Coveney and I updated Government on the matter in December 2016.

Furthermore, the issues of community benefit and participation are being considered and developed as part of this process. The proposed new Guidelines will be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and associated public consultation before they are finalised by Government.

Intensive engagement between the two Departments is ongoing in order to bring to completion the revision of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines as soon as possible.

Environmental Protection Agency Reports

48. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action which has been taken to address the concerns regarding the low level of prosecutions of big business polluters raised in the formal review of the EPA conducted by a person (details supplied) and the lack of accountability of the EPA resulting from its immunity from prosecution. [13932/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I presume the report to which the Deputy is referring is "A Review of the Environmental Protection Agency" presented to then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government by the Environmental Protection Agency Review Group in May 2011. Rigorous implementation of environmental policy and legislation, underpinned by the principle of proportionality, is the appropriate approach to adopt in protecting our environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the independent statutory body responsible for

protecting the environment in Ireland. The EPA performs a wide range of statutory functions in fulfilment of its mandate.

For example, the EPA has a key role in licensing facilities with the potential for significant environmental pollution, to ensure that their emissions do not endanger human health or harm the environment. The EPA is responsible for issuing Industrial Emission Directive Licenses; Integrated Pollution and Control (IPC) Licenses; Waste Licences; Waste Water Discharge Authorisations; Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Authorisations; and Radiological Protection Licences.

The EPA also encourages participation in its regulatory activities, through providing input to its decision making processes and reporting any negative environmental impacts from facilities that it licences such as odours, noise or water pollution.

While overall compliance with EPA Licences is good, the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement introduced a new methodology in 2015 for risk-ranking National Priority Sites which takes account of enforcement performance, giving a timely, dynamic and accurate picture of where regulatory responses should be directed.

Targeting actions in the right places is also of critical importance to the EPA in addressing the problems in both an effective and efficient manner, and they are placing a particular focus on any licensed industrial, waste and waste water facilities creating nuisance for adjacent communities.

EPA prosecutions are particularly focussed on priority sites and issues. In 2016, the EPA conducted over 1,500 site visits at licensed facilities and 17 prosecutions were pursued.

The EPA operates in a transparent and open manner, publishing comprehensive details about its activities. Further information is available to the public on www.epa.ie.

Although the EPA, like many other State Bodies, has immunity from liability for civil damages, it is important to clarify that it is not immune from prosecution, as it is answerable and accountable before the Irish Courts.

Bioenergy Strategy Implementation

49. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the draft bio-energy plan; when he anticipates publishing this plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13894/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Draft Bioenergy Plan sets out the policy areas that must be coordinated to support the development of biomass sector in Ireland. It also identifies 19 measures to support the sustainable development of the sector. There are a wide range of Government departments, agencies and state bodies that are critical enablers for bioenergy development by virtue of their responsibility for areas such as forestry, agriculture, waste, research funding and business development.

My Department is still in the process of finalising the draft Environmental report and associated Natura Impact Statement in respect of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment for the Bioenergy Plan.

I expect that these documents and a revised draft bioenergy plan to go for public consulta-

tion in quarter two this year. This consultation will be advertised on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie.

Brexit Issues

50. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way the mobile phone and broadband task force plans to deal with the impact that Brexit will have on coverage and roaming charges for persons in border communities. [13886/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, including in border communities, where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Recognising this frustration I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force. In July 2016, I established this Task Force together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits in this jurisdiction. To that end the recommendations of the Taskforce that were published in December, irrespective of Brexit, will assist in improving the quality of service and coverage that all customers, including those in border communities, will receive.

In order to maintain momentum, I, together with my colleague Minister Humphreys, have established an Implementation Group, which met for the first time on 8 March. This group will drive and monitor the implementation of the actions in the Task Force report, bringing together all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery of actions. This group will formally report every 90 days on progress made on all actions to both myself and Minister Humphreys. I am expecting the first such quarterly report in April, following the end of this quarter.

In relation to roaming, the EU Roaming Regulations aim to abolish retail roaming charges within the EU on 15 June 2017, subject to Fair Use Policy. At that point in time, the UK will still be a member of the EU and will thus be required to abide by EU law in place at that time.

It is not yet possible to say what impact Brexit will have on cross border roaming charges. This will be largely dependent on the future relationship between the EU and UK. The UK Government White Paper on Brexit sets out that the UK wishes to ensure that the UK telecoms companies can continue to trade as freely and competitively as possible with the EU. I can assure the Deputy however that my Department will continue to engage with the key stakeholders on this matter both domestically and at EU level.

Climate Change Negotiations

51. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had any contact or discussions with his US counterpart on the issue of climate change and targets contained in the Paris Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13930/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held its 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) in Paris in 2015. The major outcome of COP 21 was the agreement by over 180 countries to restrict the impact of emissions on global warming

and to limit temperature rises to 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition of limiting this increase to 1.5°C. The entry into force of the Paris Agreement required that 55% of Parties, representing 55% of global emissions, complete their ratification processes. The Agreement has now been ratified by 134 Parties, including Ireland, the EU, and the United States with its entry into force triggered at the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP 22) which took place in Marrakesh in November 2016.

The Paris Agreement will achieve its goals through a range of climate action plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), to be carried out by all Parties, which aim to address 95% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. The effectiveness of the Paris Agreement will depend on ambitious action through NDCs by governments, business, civil society, and individuals if it is to succeed in its goals. Ireland will contribute to the Paris Agreement through the EU's NDC.

I have had very positive engagements with the then United States Special Envoy on Climate Change under the previous Administration, both at the OECD in Paris and subsequently at COP22 in Marrakesh. While I have not had any direct contact to date with my counterparts in the new US Administration, I am looking forward to continued positive collaboration, both directly and through the European Union, with all international partners as we work to advance the goals of the Paris Agreement.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

52. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the current projected commencement date and completion date for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13042/17]

54. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan; his views on the latest ComReg report which highlights that only 7,623 housholds and businesses have a fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13935/17]

55. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures being taken to ensure efficient roll-out of the national broadband scheme to rural areas in particular; if he envisages that current timelines will be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13937/17]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the planned expansion and extension of broadband services has progressed in the past twelve months; the extra areas now in receipt of service; the priorities planned for the near future in this regard; when it is expected that all service black spots might be eliminated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13926/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52, 54, 55 and 61 together.

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

A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through pol-

icy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP, including over the last 12 months has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

The latest ComReg quarterly report highlights that over 65% of all broadband customers now avail of high speed broadband services (> 30 Megabits per second). It also indicates that uptake over the past quarter includes an increase in customers availing of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) of over 20.2%. While this represents only 7,623 premises, this is a large increase over a short period and is a very encouraging indicator of the popularity of FTTP products.

The High Speed Broadband Map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie :

- 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.

My Department is actively monitoring the 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.

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.

In the short-term I am working to ensure measures are put in place to assist in the rollout of the NBP State Intervention network once a contract is awarded and to improve mobile phone and broadband access in Ireland.

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 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 signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz band in 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.

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

I am satisfied that the combination of initiatives, and the procurement process to deliver a new high speed broadband network under the NBP, will put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity, and ensure that high speed broadband services are universally available.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 40.

Questions Nos. 54 and 55 answered with Question No. 52.

National Emergency Plan

56. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he is taking to ensure, in the event of a nuclear accident related to the generation and storage of nuclear power in the UK, the safety of the public in view of the proposed exit of the UK from the Euratom Treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13943/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland has a detailed National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents (NEPNA), the central purpose of which is to minimise the impact on Ireland and its people in the event of a major nuclear accident abroad, including in the UK. The Plan, which is currently under revision, can be viewed at https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/radiation/RPII_NEPNA_Doc_05.pdf.

Naturally, Ireland takes a particular interest in nuclear matters in the UK, as our nearest neighbouring nuclear State. In 2012, a report in the form of a Probabilistic Risk Assessment (PRA),

on the risks to Ireland from the site at Sellafield, was completed. The PRA was a very comprehensive and detailed scientific exercise which established that there was no threat to the health of people in Ireland arising from activity at the Sellafield site. A summary of the PRA conclusions is available at the following link: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Environment/EnvironmentalRadiation/FileDownLoad%2C31607%2Cen.pdf.

Following the PRA on Sellafield, in May 2013, the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII), which has since merged with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), published an assessment of the potential radiological impacts on Ireland from the proposed programme of new nuclear power plants in the UK. This assessment considered both routine operations and a range of postulated accident scenarios at the plants. The report concluded that the routine operation of the proposed nuclear power plants will have no measurable radiological impact on Ireland or the Irish marine environment. This report is available at:

https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/radiation/RPII_Proposed_Nuc_Power_Plants_UK_13.pdf.

The decision of the UK Government to withdraw from the Euratom Treaty was confirmed on 26 January, 2017 on the publication of the Bill seeking Parliamentary approval to issue notification of the UK's intention to withdraw from the EU.

Ireland has a close working relationship with the UK on radiological issues and will engage, as appropriate, with the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the UK Office for Nuclear Regulation, through the UK-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters. A regular bi-annual meeting of this group is scheduled for late April, where the matter will be discussed and further meetings will be arranged as appropriate. Information on UK emergencies will continue to be available to Ireland after the UK withdraw from the Euratom Treaty through bilateral arrangements. The UK is currently part of the EU's early notification and information exchange system ECURIE, which also includes, on a voluntary basis, a number of EU neighbouring States. While it is possible that the UK could withdraw from this system, a parallel system is operated by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), of which the UK is also a member.

There are currently no foreseen safety or security concerns for Ireland arising from the UK withdrawal from the Euratom Treaty. In the first instance, the UK remains a member of Euratom, and the UK nuclear industry remains subject to oversight by the EU institutions, until such time as their withdrawal from the EU is finalised, a process expected to take at least two years following notification. As such the UK will transpose Euratom's revised Nuclear Safety Directive this year. The amended Directive requires EU countries to give the highest priority to nuclear safety at all stages of the lifecycle of a nuclear power plant. It aims to improve the existing regulatory framework for the safety of nuclear installations following lessons learned from the Fukishima accident in Japan. In addition, the UK is a signatory of the IAEA's International Convention on Nuclear Safety and applies the strict international standards on safety and security set down in the Convention. This should continue to be the case after the UK withdraw from the Euratom Treaty.

Electric Vehicles

57. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the additional measures he has taken to increase the proportion of electric vehicles here; and the measures taken to expedite the roll-out of on street charging infrastructure. [13939/17]

58. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to promote the uptake of electric vehicles here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13933/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Question Nos. 57 and 58 together.

The Electric Vehicles Grant Scheme provides grant aid of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new Electric Vehicle (EV) and is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. These grants are in addition to the VRT reliefs of up to €5,000 that also apply to EVs. Budget 2017 extended VRT reliefs on Battery Electric Vehicles to 2021 and on Plugin Hybrid Electric Vehicles to end 2018. The grants scheme also remains in place.

Apart from general macroeconomic considerations, technology advancement, affordability and consumer choice are the most important levers in triggering consumers to move to electric vehicles. Notwithstanding the substantial exchequer support available for new electric vehicles, the reality of a halving of the price of oil and the pace of technology improvement has very significantly impacted electric vehicle market penetration.

Nevertheless we have seen increasing numbers of EVs registered in Ireland since the introduction of the EV Grant Scheme in 2011. To date, the purchase of 1,903 new electric vehicles has been supported under the scheme, most of which were grant aided since 2015. So far in 2017, 175 new EVs have been grant aided.

In accordance with the commitment in the Programme for Government, my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport are co-chairing a Low Emission Vehicles (LEV) Task Force involving relevant Government Departments and agencies. The work of the task force has been divided into two phases with the first phase focusing solely on EVs. The Task Force expects to report on an interim basis to Government on the first phase by June 2017, with associated recommendations. These recommendations will suggest a range of options for facilitating greater uptake of EVs in the coming years.

The ESB, through its ecars programme, has been rolling out both publicly accessible charging infrastructure and domestic charge points for electric vehicles. I am advised that almost 900 public charge-points have now been installed nationally including 79 DC fast chargers, most of which have been installed mainly on the inter-urban routes. The location of these charge-points is available on the 'ecars' section of the ESB's website at www.esb.ie. In addition, I understand that ESB ecars has installed over 2000 charge-points in domestic and commercial premises.

Gas Networks Ireland

59. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of proposals to establish a gas pipeline in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13185/17]

1114. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of plans to run a gas pipeline through Longford; if he has been in contact with Gas Networks Ireland recently regarding the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12926/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 1114 together.

The development and expansion of the natural gas network is in the first instance a commercial matter for Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), which is mandated under Section 8 of the Gas Act 1976, as amended, to develop and maintain a national system for the supply of natural gas that is both economical and efficient.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), is statutorily responsible for all aspects of the assessment and licensing of prospective operators who wish to develop and/or operate a gas distribution system within the State under the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002. I have no statutory function, under the regulatory framework, in relation to the connection of towns to the gas network.

In 2006, the CER approved a new network connections policy, which created the opportunity to reassess the feasibility of connecting certain towns to the gas network. The CER policy stipulates that in order for any town to be connected to the gas network, certain economic criteria need to be met as a prerequisite. The policy framework provides that, over a certain period, the costs of connecting the town to the network are recouped through the actual consumption of gas and the associated tariffs. This is designed by CER to obviate against uneconomic projects which would increase costs for all gas consumers. The key factor which would qualify a town, or group of towns, in any future review would be a significant increase in demand for natural gas, usually resulting from the addition of a new large industrial or commercial facility.

As regards the connection of Longford to the gas network, I am aware that the most recent assessment under CER's economic criteria was undertaken by GNI in 2016 and it was found that connecting Longford to the gas network remains unviable at this time in the absence of a significant new demand for gas.

The question of whether network extensions should, where economically feasible and in line with our energy policy goals in the White Paper, provide for the possibility of future connections in order to contribute to regional and rural development needs to be addressed, in my view. At the launch of the Action Plan for Rural Development I set out my view that there are communities partly or sometimes wholly excluded from basic criteria of modern convenience and comfort, in terms of communications, energy efficiency and fuel poverty. My longstanding position on the gas network is that it should be developed generally in rural Ireland to provide natural gas to as many areas as possible. Accordingly, and against the backdrop of the energy policy White Paper, my Department is preparing to commission research and to have a report by year-end into the potential role that natural gas could play in supporting rural centres.

In the meantime, I am interested in whether ways can be identified to facilitate additional connections to the network contributing to rural development, without additional costs for all gas consumers.

I have, over recent months, had discussions with GNI, including a meeting in December 2016, on its economic and financial analysis relating to proposals to establish a gas pipeline in County Longford.

Waste Disposal Charges

60. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress he is making with the waste industry to ensure when proposed pay-by-weight charges for refuse collection are introduced later in 2017 they will not result in price rises for households, which occurred in July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13693/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The charges applied by waste management companies are matters for those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. Any concerns relating to contract and consumer legislation should be directed to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

My Department is currently undertaking a review of pricing structures for household waste collection. Incentivised pricing for domestic waste aims to encourage people to prevent, reduce and segregate their waste, in order to reduce our impact on the environment and our reliance on landfill waste disposal. Encouraging people to reduce and recycle waste will be an important initiative in terms of helping to avoid a repeat of the landfill capacity emergencies which occurred in 2016 as well as meeting our targets and obligations under current and future EU legislation. The review is considering more than one form of incentivised pricing structure so as to allow flexibility for waste collectors to develop different offers to households and enable householders to engage with and get the most from their waste management service, but which will still encourage the prevention and segregation of waste.

A public information campaign developed by 3 Regional Waste Management Planning Offices (RWMPOs) has already begun to encourage households to (i) prevent food waste and (ii) manage their food waste more effectively. The RWMPOs will roll out further elements of a national education and awareness campaign as the year progresses which will focus on encouraging people to manage their waste correctly, including preventing and reducing waste as much as possible and recycling effectively.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 52.

Geological Survey of Ireland

62. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy on supporting stakeholders in the creation and maintenance of geoparks, such as the Burren and Cliffs of Moher geopark, in view of the environmental and economic benefits of this UN designation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13694/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Department has a clear policy that supports the development and maintenance of Geoparks in Ireland through targeted activities of the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI). GSI through its Irish Geoheritage Programme provides support including cofunding of geologists based in existing Geoparks, such as Copper Coast in Waterford, Burren and Cliffs of Moher in Clare and Marble Arch Caves which straddles the Cavan Fermanagh Border. In addition GSI has supported a geologist working in the developing Geopark area of Joyce's Country in County Galway. The GSI along with their equivalent organisation GSNI, host an annual Geopark Forum on an all island basis, with key stakeholders particularly from the tourism, heritage and local authority areas. The Department is very aware of the economic impact and potential of Geoparks and work closely with the Global Geoparks Network managed by UNESCO to ensure Ireland maximizes its opportunities in the area of geotourism and geoheritage, in which it has a great natural advantage due to the diverse nature of its geology.

Brexit Issues

63. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and En-

vironment the effects he anticipates Brexit will have on Ireland's gas supply; and the measures he is taking to deal with this. [13885/17]

78. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to secure Ireland's energy future following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU. [13892/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 78 together.

Energy is a priority sector for Government in considering the impact of Brexit. The energy systems of Ireland and the United Kingdom are interdependent with a large amount of Ireland's energy supply being imported from the United Kingdom, and the Single Electricity Market in operation across the island of Ireland.

The four key Brexit energy priorities identified by Government are:

- Maintaining trade in secure supplies of energy between the EU and UK;

- Maintaining the Single Electricity Market across the island of Ireland;

Accommodating Ireland's ability to meet EU obligations; and

- Ensuring appropriate energy infrastructure.

There is excellent cooperation between Ireland and the UK on security of energy supplies and all avenues will be pursued within the channels of communication, both at national and EU level, to ensure this remains the case post-Brexit. It must be remembered that Ireland is not the only EU Member State with energy interconnections with the UK. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands are also connected to the UK through electricity interconnectors or gas pipelines.

The EU has made the decision not to negotiate on any issues relating to Brexit until after Article 50 has been invoked. However, while attending meetings, such as the recent Energy Council, I seek out discussions with Ministers from other Member States. Through these meetings I raise awareness of how Ireland may be impacted by Brexit and what our key concerns and priorities are.

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 for Brexit, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and officials from the UK's Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

This work will continue at political, diplomatic and official level to ensure Ireland's energy needs are understood and prioritised in the forthcoming negotiation process.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 40.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

65. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he first announced plans to introduce the awaited national broadband plan; the dates on which various Ministers held press conferences to publicise it; the expectedc ommencement and completion dates given at each of these press conferences; the current projected commencement date and completion date; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [13041/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) was published in August 2012. I provided a comprehensive update on the progress of the plan to the Deputy in my response to Question No 72 on 6 December 2016. Progress continues to be made in delivering on this Government's commitment to ensure every household and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband, regardless of where they are located.

Through the NBP the Government has committed to intervening to ensure high speed broadband is available in parts of the country where commercial providers acting alone will not provide this essential service. This commitment to intervene will ensure that no part of Ireland, no household, no school, no business is left behind.

This unequivocal commitment by Government to deliver the National Broadband Plan has also served as a catalyst for industry in bringing forward investment in new infrastructure in towns, villages and rural areas of Ireland.

As of today, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

For those areas that will not be covered by commercial operators the State has committed to intervene and subsidise a network build. The procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State Intervention area 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.

My Department will shortly update the High Speed Broadband map to finalise the Intervention Area for this procurement, taking into account industry investments that have not fully materialised in the Blue area, along with concrete and credible commitments by industry for further new investments within the State Intervention area.

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.

Recreational Angling Sector

66. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions taken to meet the objective of recognising angling as a key leisure and recreation pursuit, which is one of the key objectives of the National Strategy for Angling Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13884/17]

76. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions in terms of the National Strategy for Angling Development for improving and developing angling for recreation and leisure in addition to the tourism potential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13688/17]

1132. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the funding of €5 million per annum for five years associated with the national angling plan launched over 12 months ago has been put in place; the amount of funding spent to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13827/17]

1141. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the achievements in the promotion of angling resources in terms of developing its tourism potential, which is one of the core objectives of the National Strategy for Angling Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13690/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66, 76, 1132 and 1141 together.

The angling sector contributes €836 million to the Irish economy every year supporting 11,000 Irish jobs, often in rural and peripheral communities where fewer job opportunities are available.

The National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) is the first comprehensive national framework for the development of our angling resource. It aims to increase economic contribution of angling to €932 million per year and increase employment by over 1,800 jobs.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is already investigating the full array of potential funding sources.

My Department provided €500,000 for funding support for the NSAD in 2016 and IFI reviewed project applications based on this funding. I announced approval for the first €500,000 of investment for 50 community-based projects nationwide in December last.

I have also secured an additional €1.5 million for NSAD investment for this year and further tranches of project funding will be announced in 2017.

In addition, IFI has secured funding of €536,000 from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under the Action Plan for Rural Development, with which the NSAD is aligned.

The NSAD identifies 3 high level strategic objectives;

- Making angling accessible and attractive through information, infrastructure and support.

- Tourism development through promotion of our angling resource.

- Recognition of angling as a key leisure and recreation pursuit.

The Strategy aims to develop our angling resource sustainably through balancing the economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects of any development in line with IFI's responsibilities for the protection, management, conservation and development of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources.

The strategy is intended to deliver a wide-ranging set of investments, innovations and promotions over the coming years to deliver considerable benefits in terms of employment, tourism and health and wellbeing, particularly in rural areas. Effective and sustainable implementation of the NSAD, delivered together with local and national stakeholders, will ensure stability of existing jobs and businesses reliant on angling; and the creation of new jobs as the economic impact of angling grows.

This will ensure that Ireland's fish stocks and angling infrastructure are protected and enhanced for both their economic value and their recreational benefit to the communities and visitors they serve across Ireland.

Mobile Telephony Services

67. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the implementation of the mobile phone coverage audit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13040/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. As the Deputy is aware, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force. In July 2016, I established this Task Force together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available on both Departments' websites. Action 29 of this Report, to which the Deputy is referring, concerns the delivery of a composite national coverage map by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), in quarter 4 2018. Work to deliver this, and any other audit of mobile coverage, is a matter for ComReg in its capacity as the independent regulator of the telecommunications sector.

I am very keen to see progress on all the actions recommended by the Task Force. In order to maintain momentum, I, together with Minister Humphreys, have established an Implementation Group, which met for the first time on 8 March. This group will drive and monitor the implementation of the actions in the Task Force report, bringing together all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery of actions. This includes ComReg who attends both as an action owner and in an observer capacity in recognition of its statutory independence as Regulator.

The Implementation Group will formally report every 90 days on progress made on all actions to both myself and Minister Humphreys. I am expecting the first such quarterly report in April, following the end of this quarter.

I am very pleased with the level of cooperation of all action owners in this process, and look forward to seeing progress in the delivery of the actions set out in the Taskforce report.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 43.

Legislative Measures

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will fast track the legislation to introduce a permanent ban on the dangerous practice of hydraulic fracturing here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13880/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): There is a Private Members Bill to introduce a prohibition of the exploration and extraction of onshore petroleum being considered by the Oireachtas. The Bill has passed its second stage reading in Dáil Eireann. While the passing of all legislation is a matter for the Oireachtas, the Government has indicated its support for the objective of the Bill.

There is no proposed alternative Government Bill to introduce a ban on fracking.

Bord na Móna

70. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way the acquisition of a company (details supplied) by Bord na Móna will provide a sustainable solution for its horticulture business while maintaining employment at its Kilberry plant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13695/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts 1946 to 1998. The matters raised are operational in nature and not ones in which I, as Minister, have any function.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

71. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way Ireland will meet its EU 2020 CO2 emission reduction targets; if it is expected that Ireland will not meet those targets, the amount it is anticipated the shortfall will be; the penalties that will be faced if these targets are not met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13940/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 737 of 28 February 2017 on this issue and to the replies to Question Nos. 34 and 41 on today's Order Paper.

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

In March 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published projected emissions for 2020 which indicate that Ireland's emissions at that stage could be in the range of 6 - 11% below 2005 levels, depending on whether additional policies or measures beyond those already in place by the end of 2014 are implemented. On a cumulative basis over the period 2013 - 2020, Ireland is projected to have a deficit of between 3 and 12 Megatonnes Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (MtCO2eq). According to the latest inventory published by the EPA in November 2016, GHG emissions for 2015 are estimated to be 59.84 MtCO2eq. This is 3.7% higher than emissions in 2014.

As I have previously indicated, the shortfall to 2020 projected by the EPA reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis (including the impact of the troika programme and the EU fiscal governance requirements), and the fact our 2020 target was very significantly above what would have been cost-effective for Ireland to contribute to the overall EU effort. It now represents a significant challenge to be addressed, including as we look out to 2030. In order to maximise Ireland's emissions reductions under the 2009 ESD and address the gap to the 2020 target, it will also be necessary to pursue other available options, in addition to the introduction of further policies and measures planned through the National Mitigation Plan.

In this regard, I published a draft of the National Mitigation Plan for public consultation on 15 March 2017. This public consultation will help inform further work in my own Department and across Government to finalise the Plan later this year.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 43.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

73. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that the oversight role of his Department with regard to adherence to the revised codes of practice for State bodies 2016 is fit for purpose with particular regard to oversight of the national broadcaster RTÉ. [13881/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies was published in August 2016 by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and all State bodies, including RTÉ, are required to be fully compliant in respect of the first full financial year following publication. In this regard, my Department is engaging with all State bodies under its aegis to ensure that compliance is achieved within the deadline set. In the meantime, RTÉ continues to be in compliance with the 2009 Code of Practice. I am satisfied that my Department has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure RTÉ complies with the Code of Practice and its statutory obligations under the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Inland Fisheries Ireland Investigations

74. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times since 2007 Inland Fisheries Ireland has inspected a privately operated tailrace at Clohamon on the River Slaney; the number of salmon removed from this tailrace during that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13687/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been informed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that they have undertaken two major inspections at the tailrace at Clohamon Weir in recent years. The most recent inspection was undertaken in July 2016 and resulted in IFI removing approximately 2,000 sea trout and 200 adult salmon from the tail race. A similar inspection was undertaken by IFI in August 2013 when 450 sea trout and 120 salmon, some eels and brown trout were also removed. I would be happy to arrange a detailed IFI briefing for the Deputy on the fish passage issues, challenges and remedial actions in the area.

Media Mergers

75. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has reached a decision on whether to grant permission for a company (details supplied) to purchase a media group; and his views on the concerns raised in the recent public consultation on the matter. [13889/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Following approval by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, notification of the proposed merger referenced in the question was received by me as Minister on 21 November 2016. I had 30 working days from the notification deadline of 24 November

2016 to conduct an initial, or Phase 1, assessment of the case on media plurality grounds.

This examination was guided by the relevant criteria laid out in the legislation and by the Guidelines on Media Mergers, which are available on my Department's website. The examination process laid out in the legislation and the Guidelines requires consideration to be given to a number of important criteria or measures, including diversity of ownership in the relevant media sector and in the wider media market, editorial management, governance structures, and the financial standings of the parties to the proposed merger.

On completion of this Phase 1 examination, I decided on 10 January 2017 to request the BAI to conduct a full media merger examination of the proposed transaction. The BAI will, following its examination of the proposed merger, provide me with a report detailing its recommendations on the matter within 80 working days from the date of my request. Furthermore, in accordance with the legislation, I established an advisory panel to provide an opinion to the BAI on the application of the relevant criteria in the legislation to the media merger in question.

On receipt of the BAI's report and recommendations, I have a further 20 working days within which I must make a final determination to allow the proposed acquisition to proceed; to allow the proposed acquisition to proceed with conditions; or to refuse to allow the proposed acquisition to proceed.

It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment on this case while the examination is ongoing.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 66.

Television Licence Fee Collection

77. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of his plans for the television licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13038/17]

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

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

I am currently considering proposals for the amendment of the Broadcasting Act 2009 including a legislative amendment to provide for the tendering of Licence fee collection. I intend to bring these proposals to Cabinet shortly. In the interim, my Department is liaising with the Office of Government Procurement with a view to issuing a Request for Information in the next few weeks to ascertain what the market might be able to deliver in relation to licence fee collection. The outcome of this process will inform any proposed tender that may be issued once the necessary legislative amendment is in place.

I have also requested the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to examine the longer term issue of the future funding of public service media. As the Deputy may be aware, the Committee is currently considering this issue following a period of public consultation and stakeholder engagement. I look forward to receiving their report in due course which will help inform future funding policy for public service broadcasting.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 63.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 43.

Post Office Closures

80. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been provided with information on the proposed closure of 200 post offices; the estimated effects this will have on jobs and postal services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13928/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Matters relating to the closure of post offices are operational matters for the Board and management of An Post and not ones in which I, as Minister, have any statutory function.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

81. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the forecast level for renewable energy generation in the heat, transport and power sectors by 2020; and the additional measures he is introducing to prevent future fines for failure to comply with the EU Renewable Energy Directive. [13938/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has calculated that 25.3% of electricity, 6.5% of heat and 5.7% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2015.

The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and although good progress towards the target has been made to date, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and a new Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, designed to assist in meeting our RES-E and RES-H targets.

The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

In the transport sector, Ireland aims to meet its renewable target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles also making a small contribution. Further increases to the obligation rate in the Biofuels Obligation Scheme took effect from 1 January 2017 when the rate increased to 8% by volume. I intend to publish a consultation later this year to examine the potential for further phased increases to the Biofuels Obligation

Scheme designed to assist us meeting our RES-T objectives.

The Renewable Energy Directive provides a comprehensive framework for Member States to work towards achieving individual and EU renewable energy targets.

Fisheries Protection

82. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the precise factors affecting salmon and eel stocks on the River Slaney; the reasons ten years after net fishing licences were suspended and the eel management plan came into place, these stocks have not improved to meet conservation limits; the actions he intends to take in order to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13686/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): There are many factors affecting salmon and eel stocks generally. The current salmon status of the river Slaney is based on the information provided by the Standing Scientific Committee on Salmon (SSCS) and the advice and proposals provided by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) to me as Minister. In contemplation of the 2017 fishing year, three scientific assessments of the salmon stock status on the river Slaney were undertaken based on recent fish counter data, rod catch data, and catchment-wide electro-fishing data. All three assessments indicate that the Slaney is not meeting conservation limits for both one sea winter or multi sea winter salmon stocks. Commercial fishing is only permitted where a surplus of salmon has been identified.

Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP) under EU Regulation 1100/2007, which included a closure of commercial fishing, was approved by the European Commission in 2009. Ireland's EMP and its conservation measures were reviewed in 2012 and in 2015, in accordance with the EU Regulation. Both reviews involved an examination of the latest scientific data and the conservation measures, the results of which were the subject of public consultations.

IFI have been provided funding for a new collaborative research initiative involving IFI scientists and a number of former eel fishermen to further develop national knowledge of the species and its medium to longer term potential for recovery ahead of a further review of eel management measures in 2018. This scientific fishery was commenced in 2016 and is expected to continue for three years to increase data and knowledge. The initiative also includes research on the Slaney.

Official Engagements

83. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has held meetings with Ireland's religious leaders or orders recently. [13177/17]

The Taoiseach: Like public representatives generally, I meet church leaders informally from time to time in the course of attending official or public events. Last year in particular, with the 1916 commemorations, I attended many events that were also attended by representatives from various religious groups.

As Taoiseach in the previous Government I met with representatives from the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, Atheist Ireland and the Humanist Association of Ireland as part of the Structured Dialogue Process. I also met an ecumenical delegation of European Churches in the context of Ireland's Presidency of the

Council of the European Union in 2013.

I have reported to the House on all the meetings I have held under the Structured Dialogue Process in replies to various Parliamentary Questions since 2013, most recently on the 2nd February and 15th June 2016.

I have not held any meetings under the Structured Dialogue Process since the General Election.

Departmental Staff Data

84. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff that were employed in his Department in 2015, 2016 and 2017. [13179/17]

The Taoiseach: The number of full time equivalent staff employed in my Department in 2015, 2016 and to end February in 2017 is as follows:

Year	Full time equivalent
2015(position on 31 December 2015)	199
2016(position on 31 December 2016)	188
2017(position on 28 February 2017)	190

Freedom of Information Fees

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of freedom of information requests received by his Department in respect of which the Chief State Solicitor's Office has incurred expenses for the past three years and in 2017 to date; and the amount of fees for counsel and other legal costs incurred respectively for each of the past three years and in 2017 to date. [12783/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department did not receive any Freedom of Information requests during the period in question which required the involvement of the Chief State Solicitor's Office. Consequently the question of payment for counsel fees or other legal costs does not arise.

Cross-Border Training Initiatives

86. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons that travel from here to Northern Ireland in tabular form; and the number of persons that travelled from Northern Ireland to here to work in 2015 and 2016. [12866/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): The most recent data available on cross-border commuting is based on a joint report presenting 2011 census results for both Ireland and Northern Ireland, published in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 2014. The report contained detailed information on cross border commuters.

Persons travelling for	Ireland to Northern Ireland, 2011	Northern Ireland to Ireland, 2011
For work	6,416	6,324
For study	1,879	132

Data concerning cross border travel, from Ireland to Northern Ireland from the 2016 census of population will be available in Profile 6 - Commuting in Ireland which will be published in August 2017. There was no census in Northern Ireland in 2016.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

87. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13347/17]

The Taoiseach: The relevant organisations in so far as my Department is concerned are the National Economic and Social Council and the National Statistics Board. The members of these boards including public servants do not receive any remuneration or fees in respect of their role.

Legal Costs

88. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person. [14139/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department incurred no expenditure on external legal advice in 2015, 2016, or to date in 2017.

Ministerial Allowances

89. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14570/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department has not paid any overnight expenses for staying in Dublin to either me or the Ministers of State assigned to my Department since 2011.

European Disability Strategy

90. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on calls for the strengthening of the European Accessibility Act at European Parliament level to ensure the legislation protects the rights of those with disabilities to access goods and services across Europe, including here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13491/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The EU Commission's proposals for an Accessibility Act were published on the 4 December 2015. Ireland strongly supports the thrust of the Commission's proposals, subject to the normal scrutiny process that applies to any legislative proposal. My Department is supported by an inter-

departmental Advisory Group in this detailed examination.

As the discussions in the Council of Ministers are not complete, I cannot comment publicly on the current state of the negotiations, the European Parliament's position or on the Council's possible response to that position.

Visa Applications

91. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of visas that were applied for in 2014, 2015 and 2016; the categories under which; the waiting time for each category; her plans to reduce waiting times for each category; the reason the delays generally arise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13702/17]

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

I am also advised that decisions regarding the grant or refusal of visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas, the INIS Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department. The waiting time for visa decisions are published on the Visa pages of each Visa Office and Embassy website. However, it should be noted that target times for the processing of visas are established as a business target and do not constitute a legal obligation. These business targets reflect the detailed and often complex assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications.

More generally, the processing time for visas in each location will vary based on a number of factors such as the number of applications, seasonal pressures, the complexity of the applications, whether further information or investigation is required, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process such applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary during the year and from one location to another.

The central concern, as with all visa services worldwide, in deciding on visa applications is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

Purpose	2016	2015	2014
Visit	54,662	49,548	45,063
Business	18,137	16,391	15,848
Study	12,268	12,263	12,535
Conference/Event	10,499	8,874	8,419
Join Family (under national legislation)	7,505	6,322	5,571
Join Family (EU Free Movement)	7,295	9,965	1,771
Employment	4,614	3,142	2,588
Training	1,980	2,226	2,199
Performance/Tournament	1,888	1,525	1,268

Purpose	2016	2015	2014
Re-entry	44,812	40,491	37,109
Other	5,377	5,434	6,320
Total	169,037	156,181	138,691

Property Registration Authority

92. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the Registry of Deeds at Henrietta Street maintain a strict policy of no digital photos, which is contrary to the policy of the National Archives, the National Library, most universities and county council archives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13733/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that the Registry of Deeds is managed and controlled by the Property Registration Authority. Under Section 9(3) of the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Authority is independent in the performance of its functions. The records held by the Registry of Deeds are public records. Certified copies of Memorial/ROD Application Forms filed in the Registry of Deeds can be obtained on payment of the relevant fee. The fee for every certified copy of a memorial or application is €20. The fee for a plain copy of microfilm of a memorial or application is €1.00 per page.

In addition, the facility for on-line searching in the Registry of Deeds is available to all "landdirect.ie" business account holders. All such records dating from January 1970 have been digitised and users are now able to search records on-line from 1970 to date and can also order Official Searches and Copy Memorials/Application Forms on-line. (Non-account holders may access these records at the Public Office in the Registry of Deeds.)

I am advised that in 2012 the Authority gave consideration to the use of digital photography for persons accessing copies of Registry of Deeds records. However, records in the Registry of Deeds date back to 1707 and can be fragile, requiring very careful handling and, occasionally, supervised access. As part of the review, the Authority considered all aspects including the potential social and business re-use of the records in the light of its available resources. The Authority decided to maintain its current policy due to operational reasons, i.e. the scale of resources that would be required operationally to supervise access to the records and in addition, the risk of potential damage and wear and tear of the record books. I am advised that the Property Registration Authority has no current plans to change the "no photography" policy in the Registry of Deeds as access to the records is through the Registration of Deeds Rules 2009-2013, subject to the fees as set out in the Registry of Deeds (Fees Order) 2008.

Family Law Cases

93. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated full year cost of setting up an agency comparable to the child maintenance service in Northern Ireland. [13854/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under Irish law, issues arising from disagreements about the provision of maintenance for dependent children, or failure by persons with maintenance responsibilities for children to provide proper maintenance, are determined by the courts. Relevant legislation in this area includes section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, section 8 of the Family Law Act 1995, section 13 of the Family Law (Di-

vorce) Act 1996 and section 45 of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provided for a number of improvements in the law relating to maintenance of children.

The legislative arrangements relating to child maintenance in Northern Ireland are significantly different to those that apply in this jurisdiction.

The establishment in this State of an agency comparable to the child maintenance service in Northern Ireland would require substantial changes to the legal framework for determining issues relating to child maintenance. The requirement of Article 34 of the Constitution that justice be administered in courts established by law by judges appointed in the manner provided by the Constitution is a matter that would have to be carefully considered.

The full year cost of establishing a child maintenance agency would depend on a number of factors, including the specific functions that such an agency would perform and the expected level of demand for the services of such an agency. As I have no plans at present for the establishment of a child maintenance agency, it is not possible at this stage to provide an estimate of the establishment costs.

The Deputy will be aware that the general objective of the Mediation Bill 2017, which is currently before Dáil Éireann, is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings, including proceedings relating to maintenance of children, thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and relieving the stress involved in court proceedings.

In addition, the Government is committed to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. My Department is working on a General Scheme of a Family Court Bill which will aim to streamline family law court processes, clarify jurisdictional issues and provide for a set of guiding principles to help ensure that the Family Court will operate in a user-friendly and efficient manner. The intention is to establish a dedicated Family Court within the existing court structures. The Family Court Bill will support the proposals in the Mediation Bill 2017 by encouraging greater use of alternative dispute resolution to assist in more timely resolution of family law cases.

Commercial Rates Calculations

94. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the method of calculation new wind farm developments are subject to in order to calculate the rateable valuation of the development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13036/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I should advise the Deputy that while the Valuation Office came under the aegis of my Department with effect from 1 January 2016, the Commissioner of Valuation as head of that Office is independent in the performance of his functions and I, as Minister for Justice and Equality have no function in the valuation of property for rates purposes, or in any appeal against a valuation.

The Valuation Act 2001 provides for a revaluation programme which is maintained on a rolling 5-10 year cycle. The Valuation Office has recently revalued all commercial properties in a number of rating authority areas as part of a revaluation programme that will see the valuation of all commercial properties in the State brought up to date by reference to modern property values. I have been informed by the Commissioner that a number of wind farms in the relevant counties have been revalued as part of this programme.

The purpose of a revaluation in a Local Authority area is to redistribute the rates burden with each ratepayer's liability reflecting up-to-date property rental values. The Valuation Acts 2001-2015 provide for an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal, (an independent statutory body established for that purpose), and a subsequent appeal to the High Court on a point of law, for all valuations carried out under the Valuation Acts. The basis of rateable valuation for all property is "net annual value", as defined in Part 11 of the Valuation Act 2001. Section 48 of the Act, as amended, provides that net annual value is the rent for which, one year with another, the property might, in its actual state, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, on the assumption that the probable average annual cost of repairs, insurance and other expenses (if any) that would be necessary to maintain the property in that stage, and all rates and other taxes in respect of the property, are borne by the tenant of the property.

I am informed that in accordance with well established international valuation principles and best professional practice, and in keeping with the case law of the independent Valuation Tribunal and the jurisprudence of the Higher Courts, various methodologies may be used in estimating the net annual value of a property or class of properties for the purposes of section 48. One commonly used method is known as the "receipts and expenditure" method of valuation where trading accounts relating to the use of a particular property are analysed to estimate its net annual value. Another method of valuation used from time to time, depending on the particular circumstances and type of property involved is known as the "contractor's method" where the annual equivalent of the cost of construction, allowing for depreciation as appropriate and the value of the site, is used to arrive at the net annual value.

I am advised that, as regards the valuation of wind farms, the Valuation Office sought information on construction and development costs as well as detailed trading information for such facilities and that the information provided was used to draw up a valuation scheme, based on a combination of the "receipts and expenditure" and the "contractor's" methodologies, for the wind farms which have to date been valued under the revaluation programme. I am also advised that the valuations of a number of wind farms have been appealed to the independent Valuation Tribunal, which will issue its determination in due course.

Data Protection

95. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her position in relation to the challenge by a person (details supplied) to the stand contractual clauses for the transfer of data from the EU to non-EU locations such as the US; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14080/17]

96. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the Data Protection Commissioner will be more vigilant than in the past regarding companies that use personal data for commercial purposes without consent, specifically taking into account the new regulatory context opened by the General Data Protection Regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14081/17]

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

Under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, the Data Protection Commissioner acts independently in the performance of her tasks and exercise of her powers. It would be entirely inappropriate for me, therefore, to make any comment on matters which have been the subject of recent High Court proceedings that were initiated by the Data Protection Commissioner in the exercise of her independent powers. I understand that the Court has reserved judgment in

the matter.

I should add that the Commissioner will continue to act in a completely independent manner in performing her tasks and exercising her powers under the General Data Protection Regulation which is due to enter into force in May 2018.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

97. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider the installation of CCTV cameras on the bridges over the River Shannon at Termonbarry, Roosky, Ballyleague and Lanesborough in counties Roscommon and Longford to help combat criminal gangs using these routes. [12784/17]

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

I am informed that An Garda Síochána has in place a network of CCTV systems that are planned and implemented on the basis of the Garda Commissioner's identified operational needs and priorities.

Under the Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 which is intended to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to ensure that the organisation can meet present and future challenges, it is envisaged that CCTV will be used in new ways utilising technologies such as Face in the Crowd and Shape in the Crowd biometrics to identify key targets and enhance community safety. In addition, more vehicles will be equipped with Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology, and will have the capability to receive and transmit data over 3G, so that they can quickly track criminals using the road network and road traffic offenders.

Office of Public Works Properties

98. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department or the Garda has any claim to the ownership in full or part to a golf club (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12812/17]

100. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a sports club (details supplied); if it has individual financial accounts; the way in which the club is financially accountable within the Garda; if she is satisfied with the way in which the club has been run; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12828/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 100 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote for the purposes of the Comptroller and Auditor General Acts. I am, however, advised by the Commissioner that the land on which the golf club in question is situated is in the ownership of the Office of Public Works.

The Deputy will be aware from media reports that a draft interim Internal Audit Report of the financial procedures in the Garda College has been prepared by the Internal Audit Section

of An Garda Síochána and, as I have said previously, clearly I would be concerned by any irregularity in audits and accounting at the Garda College. I understand that this report will be finalised shortly and, in the normal course, will be furnished to the Comptroller and Auditor General by the Commissioner for his information and for any further enquiries he may wish to make. Furthermore, I understand that the Policing Authority considered this matter at its January meeting with An Garda Síochána and has requested that the final report be furnished to it once it is available.

Airport Security

99. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the role of Garda and immigration officials in the US pre-clearance process to ensure that in the exercise of their public functions, a person's rights under the Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, EU law or international human rights law will not be violated. [12825/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my replies to Parliamentary Questions No. 111, 106 and 138 of the 7th February, 2017 and to Parliamentary Question No. 92 of 8th February, 2017.

Persons who avail of the US preclearance facilities in the State do so voluntarily as provided for in the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009 and decisions taken by the US authorities at US preclearance facilities in the State on clearance to board US bound aircraft are taken solely by the US authorities. Irish officials or An Garda Síochána have no involvement in those decisions.

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

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

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 98.

Office of Public Works Properties

101. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the property and land the Garda owns in an area (details supplied); if the property and land have been rented or sold; and if so, the source of the funds received within the Garda accounts.

[12829/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised that the land referred to by the Deputy was purchased by the Office of Public Works in 2007 and that its Property Management Services Unit is responsible for the lands and any rental contracts.

Garda Investigations

102. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will meet with a person (details supplied) and respond directly to a matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12853/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 93 of 6 December 2016 and the written reply to that question. While the position remains the same, it is, of course, open to this individual to seek independent legal advice in relation to their concerns if they so wish.

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 93 on 6 December, 2016.

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

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

Legislative Process

103. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the interdepartmental working group preparing heads of Bills and legislation on providing access for An Garda Síochána to the State's industrial relations structures contains any persons from the Garda representative associations; if not, the reason for their exclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12870/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, following the approval of Government for the drafting of the Heads of a Bill to afford the Garda Associations access to the Workplace Relations Commissions and the Labour Court, a Working Group to assist in the consideration of these matters was established.

In addition to the technical legislative changes that will be required, a number of important and complex issues will fall to be considered in this context, including the status of the Garda Associations established under the Garda Síochána Acts and the related question of constraints on members taking industrial action. The Working Group brings together the appropriate Government Departments and bodies with expertise and responsibility in these areas.

The Working Group has been asked to report in relation to the Heads of the Bill by 31 May to allow sufficient time for the necessary legislation to be enacted this year. The Working Group has also been asked to consider and report to me by 31 October on the internal industrial relations processes and procedures to be put in place in the Garda Síochána in the context of the

granting of access to the WRC and Labour Court.

I have made it clear in my discussions with the Garda Associations that I believe that it is critical to their being granted access to the WRC and Labour Court, that their views are communicated to the Working Group. I have also made clear to the Chair of the Working Group, the highly respected former Secretary General of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Mr John Murphy, that the Associations should be consulted right through the process.

I understand that the first consultation session with the Garda Associations took place on Thursday last, 16 March and I am informed that the Working Group will shortly circulate a consultation paper to the Associations setting out options in relation to the key issues. Further consultations will follow between then and the completion of this phase of the work in May. It is vitally important that the Associations take advantage of the opportunity being provided, to engage positively and constructively with the Working Group, in order to ensure that any conclusions reached or proposals made by the Group are informed by the views of the Associations.

The inclusion of the Garda Associations in this intensive consultation process is proof positive of the Government's commitment to creating an industrial relations architecture in the Garda Síochána that delivers for its members and for the public who rely on them to provide the policing and security service of the State.

Visa Applications

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a visa in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12872/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the person concerned made an application to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) at the end of January 2017, for permission to remain in the State as the spouse of an Irish National, and that this application is currently being processed. All applications are dealt with in strict chronological order and the processing time can take several months. Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Garda Remuneration

105. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason third level degrees attained by members of An Garda Síochána over a period of more than four years are not accepted for the purpose of pay increments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12883/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It has not been possible to finalise this reply in the time available. I will provide the information sought by the Deputy as soon as possible.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

106. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a business undergoing a revaluation for the purposes of commercial rates and which decides to appeal the results of the revaluation process could be subject to an increase in its valuation; if so, her views on whether it is unfair; and if she will review this matter. [12897/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions on valuation appeals are a matter for the Valuation Tribunal which is a statutorily independent body established to hear appeals against determinations of the Commissioner of Valuation. I, as Minister for Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in either of the decision-making processes.

The revaluation provisions in the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area to reflect changes in value due to economic factors, differential movements in property values or other external factors such as road or other infrastructural development in the vicinity of a property. The purpose of revaluation is to bring more equity, fairness and transparency into the local authority rating system - distributing the commercial rates liability more equitably between ratepayers. Following revaluation, there is generally a much closer and uniform relationship between rental values of property and their commercial rates liability.

The Valuation Acts provide several avenues of redress for the occupiers of property and for a number of other categories of persons listed in the legislation who are dissatisfied with a determination of value under the provisions of the legislation. Firstly, there is a statutory right for the occupier of a property to make representations within 40 days to the Valuation Office in relation to the proposed valuation to be placed on their property. Since the statutory mandate of the Valuation Office is to ensure that valuations of all rateable property are correct, equitable and uniform, relative to each other, consideration of representations made to the Office in respect of an individual property may result in a decrease, increase or no change in the valuation of that subject property. The outcome is based on the evidence provided to and available to the Valuation Office. In any event, this outcome may be the subject of an appeal to the independent Valuation Tribunal. Finally, there is a right of appeal to the Higher Courts on a point of law.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question in relation to the appeal process to the Valuation Tribunal, the legislation specifies the categories of persons who have a right to appeal to the Valuation Tribunal. These include (a) an occupier of the subject property under appeal; (b) an occupier of other rateable property situated in the same local authority area as the property under appeal; (c) a rating authority; and (d) a person, in respect of any property in relation to which he or she is an interest holder. While in most cases, the appellant is usually the occupier of the premises subject to revaluation or their professional representative, it is possible for a person listed in categories (b) to (d) to lodge an appeal. In determining an appeal the Valuation Tribunal may, under Section 37 of the Valuation Act 2001 as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, decrease or increase a valuation or determine that no change is warranted.

In reaching its decisions, the statutory duty of the members of the Valuation Tribunal is to ensure that valuations are (insofar as is reasonably practical) correct, equitable and uniform, relative to each other. The professional expertise in both law and valuation practice of the Tribunal members is brought to bear in arriving at such decisions. Therefore I have no reason to consider that the decisions of the Valuation Tribunal are unfair in circumstances where the valuation of a property is reduced, remains the same or is increased. Appeals to the Tribunal are dealt with in a comprehensive manner involving the consideration on a quasi-judicial basis

of detailed, formal written documentation submitted to it. The Tribunal can hold hearings as provided for in the legislation which allows for the taking of oral evidence and the receipt and consideration of written submissions made to it by and on behalf of all parties to the appeal concerned, including any person appearing to the Tribunal to have an interest in or be likely to be affected by the determination of the appeal. When issuing its decisions, the Valuation Tribunal issues formal, written judgments which provide clear and cogent reasons for its decisions and these judgments are available to the public on the Tribunal's website, www.valuationtribunal.ie.

International Time Zones

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if further consideration has been given to bring forward the start of summer time to the last weekend in February; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12940/17]

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

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

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

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

Inquiries into Garda Activities

108. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the proposed inquiry into allegations made by a person (details supplied) and which the Government previously indicated would be the subject of an inquiry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12943/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Inquiry to which the Deputy refers is to be established following my acceptance of a recommendation by the panel of the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), the role of which was to review complaints of Garda misconduct or failings in investigations carried out by An Garda Síochána. Arising from its recommendations, I have decided, in the case mentioned, to establish an inquiry under the terms of section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended.

Draft terms of reference were prepared which, in accordance with section 42 (3A) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, were the subject of consultation with the Policing Authority. This consultation with the Policing Authority is now completed. It was however necessary to seek further advice from the Office of the Attorney General on certain matters arising.

Officials in my Department are continuing their discussions with the Office of the Attorney General with regard to matters concerning the establishment of this inquiry and finalising its terms of reference.

Although certain administrative arrangements require to be put in place in advance of the establishment of this and the other Inquiries arising from the IRM, I can inform the Deputy that I hope to be in a position to proceed to its establishment in the near future.

Inquiries into Garda Activities

109. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she or her office has received correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding the person's interaction with the Garda Síochána; the actions that were taken in respect of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12973/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The particular case to which the Deputy refers was amongst those considered under the mechanism established for the independent review of certain allegations of Garda misconduct, or inadequacies in the investigation of certain allegations, the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

A panel consisting of two senior and five junior counsel was established for that purpose. I would like to emphasise that every case presented to the panel was reviewed by independent counsel, who made an objective recommendation. It was open to counsel to make any recommendation that they saw fit. The recommendation in this case was that I should take no further action. I accepted that recommendation and a letter issued to the complainant in December 2015 notifying him of the outcome and the reasons for same.

Further correspondence from the complainant to the Taoiseach has been forwarded to me recently for reply. A reply will issue shortly.

Immigration Policy

110. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will respond directly regarding the current financial rules that apply to American retirees wishing to retire here (details supplied); her immediate plans to change the current requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12983/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate it is the responsibility of Government to decide polices for the management of migration and the control of our borders in the public interest. The simple fact that someone may wish to settle here as a retired person does not, of itself, create an entitlement for that person to do so. Over a number of years retired persons seeking to come to Ireland to live has become a prominent new channel for migration into the State. In the interests of clarity and greater transparency the immigration service published guidelines for such persons in March 2015. The overriding requirement is that such persons must be able to show that they have sufficient resources. In particular, they must satisfy the immigration service that they:

- Have an annual income equivalent to €50,000

- Have savings equivalent to the cost of buying a new home in Ireland

- Have comprehensive private Irish-based medical insurance

Following a public consultation process in October 2016 the immigration service undertook a review of this policy. This review is being finalised and decisions on foot of it will be made in the near future. While it would be premature at this stage to outline the details of the proposed scheme, the Deputy will appreciate that it is reasonable that persons seeking to retire in the State should have a close association with Ireland, that they can fully support themselves while resident here and that they should be approved for this purpose before taking up residence.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy arrived in the State in May 2015 as a visitor and subsequently applied to the immigration authorities to remain in Ireland as a retired person. After due consideration of all the circumstances in this case this request was refused because the person concerned did not satisfy all the conditions for settling in the State as a retired person as set out in the policies set out by INIS. This decision was subsequently reviewed twice at the request of the person concerned and the original decision was upheld on both occasions. In August 2016 this person was granted a short period of permission to remain in the State for medical reasons and after voluntarily leaving the State at the end of 2016, was subsequently granted temporary permission to re-enter the State in March 2017 for a specific period in order to attend a specific medical appointment.

Prison Facilities

111. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to close or move the training unit in operation in Mountjoy Prison; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13001/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service has commenced the repurposing of the Training Unit Place of Detention (on the Mountjoy Prison Campus) to a dedicated Unit for older prisoners. A key action of the current Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan (Action 2.5) is to ensure that older prisoners are identified as a specific group who have particular needs within the prison population. There are currently a number of such prisoners in the care of the Irish Prison Service who have significant and ongoing healthcare needs, many of whom are currently dispersed across the estate and in some cases significant distances away from the healthcare providers they rely on. The establishment of the unit will allow the Irish Prison Service to accommodate such prisoners in a purpose built unit within close proximity to a variety of medical care and will also allow for appropriate remedial works to the accommodation which is currently outdated and lacks in-cell sanitation thus delivering on the commitment to provide in-cell sanitation to all prison cells. It is envisaged that the repurposing of the unit will take 18-24 months to complete. During this time, it will be necessary to accommodate current prisoners elsewhere in the prison estate, primarily within the Mountjoy Campus.

It is intended that prisoners who are currently on programmes of temporary release will be facilitated in continuing with such programmes.

Community Policing

112. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to increase the number of community gardaí based at Lucan, Ronanstown, Ballyfermot, Leixlip and Clondalkin Garda stations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13014/17]

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.

The Commissioner has advised that it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises. In that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within An Garda Síochána.

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by the 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 that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, some 838 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. 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.

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 the 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 Lucan, Ronanstown, Ballyfermot, Leixlip and Clondalkin Garda stations on the 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, as provided by the Commissioner.

Garda Station	Number of Community Gardaí
Lucan	6
Ronanstown	7
Ballyfermot	4
Leixlip	0
Clondalkin	7

Community Policing

113. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if discussions have taken place with An Garda Síochána and the Garda Commissioner regarding the importance of community gardaí as a knowledge base for tackling drug-related crime, identifying potential flashpoints and providing positive and trusted engagement with local communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13015/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government has, in its Programme for a Partnership Government, recognised the importance of community policing. It commits the Government to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing in every community throughout the country in order to provide reassurance to citizens and prevent crime. This commitment is underlined by very significant investments in Garda resources.

However, as the Deputy will appreciate, the specific policing and investigative strategies which may be employed in particular circumstances are a matter for the Commissioner and her management team and I do not have a direct role in this regard. In this regard, the Policing Plan of An Garda Síochána sets out the continued commitment of An Garda Síochána to pro-actively target groups and individuals engaged in organised crime activity including drug crime. I am advised that the National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau continues to lead out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. The Bureau continues its policy of working with Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level. I am advised that community policing continues to be a key aspect of the Garda approach to the prevention and detection of crime. Gardaí engage with a wide range of community based groups, as well in more formal settings such as Joint Policing Committees, to ensure that local issues can be aired and appropriate partnerships formed with communities to address matters of concern. Gardaí also support over 3,700 Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes nationwide, and these form an important partnership with An Garda Síochána to prevent crime and protect communities, especially the elderly and more vulnerable persons. In addition, the Garda Text Alert Scheme provides an effective means for Gardaí to communicate crime prevention information to local communities.

On 9 June 2016, the Garda Commissioner launched a five year programme to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána, to ensure that it can meet present and future po-

licing and security challenges. An important principle included in the plan is increased Garda visibility, with crime prevention being the number one priority. The Garda modernisation plan was developed with the benefit of inputs from Garda personnel and community stakeholders, as well as the experience of police forces in other jurisdictions. The measures in the plan also respond to reports and recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate and the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

In conclusion, all Garda activities, including community policing, will undoubtedly benefit from the resources now coming on stream through the Garda recruitment programme, and in particular the Government's commitment to increase Garda numbers to 15,000, so that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to address the needs of communities throughout the country and into the future.

Garda Equipment

114. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to replace or upgrade the PULSE system (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13016/17]

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

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 is intended to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to ensure that the organisation can meet present and future challenges. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Programme prioritises ICT projects with the aim of fully embedding technology initiatives to improve the services delivered to communities by An Garda Síochána. Key outputs from the Programme include:

- the introduction of mobile technology solutions to enable operational Gardaí to access core information systems, including PULSE, while on duty and away from Garda stations;

- providing members with real-time information on mobile devices, as well as enabling investigation teams to collect and share information digitally;

- the continued extension of the Garda network throughout 2017 to ensure that non-networked stations gain access to relevant systems;

- modernisation of Garda information systems, such as PULSE, to ensure that members have quick access to timely and accurate information.

In addition, I understand that the following key projects have commenced and will see delivery across 2017:

- Investigations Management System which will support the management of activities completed as part of an investigation, maintain a full history of the chain of events in an investigation, manage information gathered, decisions made and actions taken;

- Property and Exhibit Management System which will be used to record all property and exhibits which come into Garda possession and manage them throughout their life cycle within the organisation from crime scene to court;

- Enterprise Content Management system which will provide An Garda Síochána with a single enterprise content repository for all documentation and multimedia content created (for example CCTV clips); and

- Rosters and Duty Management system.

The Programme is being supported by significant Government investment of some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021. This major investment will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime and will facilitate progress on important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation.

Direct Provision System

115. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the methodology used for awarding points to persons in a location (details supplied) to purchase food on the new on-site supermarket; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13075/17]

116. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount a point used at the new on-site supermarket in a location (details supplied) equates to in euro; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13076/17]

117. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the person who sets the price for the items available at the new on-site supermarket at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13077/17]

118. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the independent review mechanisms and oversight in operation to monitor the prices set by the new on-site supermarket at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13078/17]

119. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason persons cannot be given a food allowance to buy their items in a supermarket of their choice instead of using a points system which only allows them to purchase items from the on-site supermarket at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13079/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 to 119, inclusive, together.

Following publication of the Programme for a Partnership Government, which outlined the Government's commitment to improving the accommodation environment for protection applicants, in particular for children and families, the Reception and Integration Agency of my Department began the process of examining ways in which this commitment could be delivered upon.

The McMahon Report *'Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers'* also recognised the value of home cooking for families in the protection process.

The system currently in place in Mosney is the culmination of a lengthy analysis process by staff in the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) and by the management team at the centre. This involved a number of residents volunteering to participate in live shopping expeditions, an

examination of the household shopping basket for families and single persons, an examination of responses to questionnaires completed by all residents on the range and type of foodstuffs they would like to be made available and an analysis of the findings of the Safe Food Report 'What is the cost of a healthy food basket in the Republic of Ireland in 2016?'.

This analysis led to the allocation of a weekly number of points to each adult and child resident in the centre. These points are then used to obtain fresh food in the Food Hall. As a result, parents and single persons are now able to cook food in their own accommodation for their own families. The Food Hall is open six days a week and stock is replenished as required. Ethnically appropriate foods and spices are also available. Non-standard items can be ordered in and made available the following day provided such items can be sourced from traceable suppliers.

The successful introduction and implementation of this new system has been welcomed by residents and staff alike and has had a very positive impact on the atmosphere right through the centre. Residents are free to cook what they want and when they want. The introduction of the system addresses one of the key recommendations of the McMahon report in that children will now see their parents cook a meal for their family. This pilot project has been a great success and it is intended that variations of the scheme will be rolled out to other centres throughout the country.

The system is kept under constant review by both the management in the accommodation centre and by RIA staff. The points system in use does not have any monetary equivalent and the points cannot be used in any other commercial outlet. The Deputy may be aware that a recent EU decision indicated that protection applicants throughout the Union should have their needs provided for under a benefit in kind system such as this points system, and this pilot project has more than fulfilled the expectations of the McMahon report recommendations in respect of home cooking for residents. The Government has no plans to introduce a change in the weekly allowance paid to protection applicants living in accommodation centres provided by the State.

Prison Facilities

120. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the investment plan for the training unit in Mountjoy Prison; and her plans for the unit and its long-term role in the rehabilitation of prisoners. [13083/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service has commenced the repurposing of the Training Unit Place of Detention (on the Mountjoy Prison Campus) to a dedicated Unit for older prisoners. A key action of the current Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan (Action 2.5) is to ensure that older prisoners are identified as a specific group who have particular needs within the prison population. There are currently a number of such prisoners in the care of the Irish Prison Service who have significant and ongoing healthcare needs, many of whom are currently dispersed across the estate and in some cases significant distances away from the healthcare providers they rely on. The establishment of the unit will allow the Irish Prison Service to accommodate such prisoners in a purpose built unit within close proximity to a variety of medical care and will also allow for appropriate remedial works to the accommodation which is currently outdated and lacks in-cell sanitation thus delivering on the commitment to provide in-cell sanitation to all prison cells. It is envisaged that the repurposing of the unit will take 18-24 months to complete. During this time, it will be necessary to accommodate current prisoners elsewhere in the prison estate, primarily within the Mountjoy Campus.

It is intended that prisoners who are currently on programmes of temporary release will be facilitated in continuing with such programmes.

Garda Stations

121. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a Garda station in Dromahair, in view of the national review of An Garda Síochána stations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13097/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including in relation to Garda stations.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme gave rise to the closure of some 139 Garda stations, including Dromahair, in 2012 and 2013, following the completion by An Garda Síochána of a comprehensive review of its district and station network. That review was undertaken with the objective of identifying opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Gardaí to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

The Programme for Government commits the Government to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. A cornerstone of this commitment is the Government 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.

Revisiting the decisions made to close Garda stations at the depths of the recession is also part of that commitment.

In this context, I have requested the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions, to identify 6 stations for reopening on a pilot basis to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. The pilot will feed into the wider review being undertaken by the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, at the request of the Policing Authority, of the dispersal and use of resources available to An Garda Síochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities.

I understand that work is continuing in An Garda Síochána to identify the 6 stations for inclusion in the pilot and that consultations have taken place with relevant stakeholders, including the Policing Authority. I expect to receive a report from the Commissioner by the end of May in connection with the exercise.

Garda Training

122. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if all members of An Garda Síochána will receive diversity training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13125/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the training of its members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 commits An Garda Síochána to ensuring that every individual and community that the organisation comes into contact with will be treated equally, fairly and with dignity. An Garda Síochána's Policing Plan 2017 commits An Garda Síochána to building trusting relationships with local communities, in particular with minority and diverse groups, through the implementation of a new Garda Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner in relation to diversity training and I will write to her upon receipt of same.

Departmental Bodies Contracts

123. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the contracts entered into by her Department and its agencies with a company (details supplied); the nature of these contracts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13145/17]

124. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the contracts entered into by An Garda Síochána with a company (details supplied); the nature of these contracts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13146/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

I can confirm that my Department and its agencies have not entered into any contracts with the company in question.

Criminal Assets Bureau

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the detail of the assets seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, in Cork city and county or assets located elsewhere but owned by persons in Cork city and county for each year since 2010; the details of such assets currently held by CAB; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13156/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Criminal Assets Bureau takes actions under the Proceeds of Crime Acts 1996 to 2016 to deprive or to deny persons of assets which derive, or are suspected to derive, directly or indirectly from criminal conduct; or the benefit of such assets.

Sections 2 and 3 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996 provide the mechanism under which the Bureau can apply to the High Court seeking to freeze or restrain a person/entities dealing with a specific asset. In accordance with these provisions, the High Court may, in circumstances where an interim order or interlocutory order under that legislation is in place, appoint a receiver in respect of the property to which the order relates.

Section 4 provides for the transfer of property to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. This Section refers to assets which have been deemed to be the proceeds of criminal

conduct, for a period of not less than seven years, and over which no valid claim has been made under Section 3(3) of the Proceeds of Crime Act.

Section 4A allows for a consent disposal order to be made by the respondent, thus allowing the property to be transferred to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in a period shorter than seven years.

In accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996 an annual report on the activities of the Bureau is prepared and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The reports include details of the number of receivership orders obtained, the values of such orders and the amounts realised by the Bureau to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the benefit of the Central Exchequer in the particular year. The Annual Reports are available in the Oireachtas library and on the website of An Garda Síochána and my Department. The Annual Report of the Bureau for 2015 is the latest available Report.

With regard to the specific information sought, I can inform the Deputy that this information is not available. The Bureau operates on a national basis, targeting assets wherever they are situated and the Bureau does not record its activities on a geographical basis.

Crime Data

126. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of burglaries reported in Drogheda, Dundalk, Ardee, Dunleer, Laytown and Bettystown by quarter over the last 12 months, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13164/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Prisoner Data

127. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the percentage of the prison population made up of non-nationals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13229/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that on 31 January, 2017 the number of non Irish nationals in custody was 492 of which 469 were Male and 23 were Female. This represents approximately 13% of the overall prison population for this day.

Courts Service Data

128. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 53 of 16 February 2017 (details supplied), if each

driver was convicted of just one offence of drink-driving; the number of drivers convicted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13280/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Courts Service has confirmed that the precise data sought by the Deputy would require a detailed examination of individual case files for drink-driving prosecutions, which would require the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of staff time to provide. However, the Courts Service has provided relevant data contained in the table attached, which will be of assistance to the Deputy. The table details the number of convictions for drink-driving offences and the number of persons convicted of this offence for the period 2015 to end January 2017 inclusive.

Courts Service - Data relating to the offence of drink-driving

Year	Convictions (offences)	Convictions (persons)
2015	2,574	2,442
2016	2,844	2,718
January 2017	329	314

Insurance Fraud

129. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on the establishment of a new fraud database as set out in the report of the cost of insurance working group and its 33 recommendations; if additional staff will be hired for this unit; the intended budget to be allocated; the way this information will be gathered and stored; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9544/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As Deputy will be aware, the Department of Finance published the 'Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance' in January this year. One of the recommendations (No. 25), which my Department has taken the lead on, is to establish a fully functioning integrated fraud database for industry to detect patterns of fraud. The purpose of the Database is to reduce levels of fraud by providing access to details of incident data which can be used to detect patterns of potentially fraudulent behaviour.

In order to determine the parameters of the database to be established and consider the policy and legislative issues, as well as funding, access and content, a Working Group has been established. The deadline for this scoping exercise is the end of June 2017, when the Group will submit a report to the Working Group on the Cost of Insurance, which is chaired by Minister of State, Eoghan Murphy, T.D. If it is determined, following this initial scoping exercise, that a database is a viable option, then a further exercise will be carried out to put the necessary legislative and other measures in place to facilitate it.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

130. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will confirm that, in line with the one person, one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of her Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and, if any such remuneration is being paid, that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid be reclaimed. [13321/17]

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

to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that, in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of my Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Garda Data

131. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Louth division currently on long-term leave or sick leave; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13331/17]

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. 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 further informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Louth Division, on the 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 303 of which 9 are currently on long term leave, including sick leave.

When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), 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, 41 of whom have been assigned to the Louth 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 every Garda Division, including the Louth 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.

Garda Operations

132. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will have the Dáil Éireann records corrected with regard to Parliamentary Question No. 623 of 28 June 2005, in which it was incorrectly stated that it was in July 2000 that the storage site Clancy Barracks had been sold; and if she will correct the record to state correctly that the sale was completed on 26 March 2004. [13376/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to the response to Questions Nos. 450, 451, 453, 454, 455, 456 and 457 of 8 October 2013 which sets out the position in respect of this matter. The Deputy will appreciate, of course, that the sale of Clancy Barracks, completed in March 2004, was a matter for the Minister for Defence at that time.

Legal Costs

133. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority; if it will have a role in adjudicating on claims that currently involve the taxing master; if so, if this role will be retrospective; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13444/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 makes extensive provision in Part 10 for a new and enhanced legal costs regime that will bring greater transparency to how legal costs are charged along with a better balance between the interests of legal practitioners and those of their clients. As part of this structural reform, under section 139(1) of the Act, the existing Office of the Taxing-Master, which is an Office of the High Court, is to become the Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators. The new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators will, therefore, continue to operate independently in its determination of disputed legal costs and the Legal Services Regulatory Authority will not be performing those functions currently exercised by the Taxing-Master retrospectively or otherwise. However, this would not preclude the Regulatory Authority from recommending the future referral of a legal costs matter to the Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators as part, for example, of the resolution of a complaint.

The Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators will be supported by a modernised transparency and governance framework with prescribed business, strategic and annual reporting cycles. It will be under the management of the Chief Legal Costs Adjudicator under whose general direction the other Legal Costs Adjudicators in the Office will operate. Under the terms of section 140 of the 2015 Act the new Office will establish and maintain a publicly accessible Register of Determinations which will also state the reasons for the legal costs determinations concerned. Under section 142 the Chief Legal Costs Adjudicator may also prepare and publish, for the guidance of Legal Costs Adjudicators, legal practitioners and the public, guidelines on the manner in which the functions of the Legal Costs Adjudicators are to be performed. For the first time in legislation, Schedule 1 of the 2015 Act sets out the Principles Relating to Legal Costs that are to be applied under section 155 in the adjudication of legal costs by a Legal Costs Adjudicator while also having regard to such matters as whether the work claimed was actually

and appropriately done, was reasonably charged and the costs concerned reasonably incurred. It should also be noted that a number of the new provisions contained in Part 10 of the 2015 Act will also apply to legal costs determinations carried out by County Registrars.

While the Legal Costs Regulatory Authority will not assume any of the current functions of the Taxing-Master it will, under the new complaints regime contained in Part 6 of the 2015 Act, continue to provide an opportunity for the informal resolution of more minor legal costs disputes between legal practitioners and their clients at what might best be described as the consumer level. This facility is intended to allow more minor legal costs matters to be resolved informally at the invitation of the Regulatory Authority without incurring the substantial costs and time that would arise under a full and formal referral to the Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators. However, it should be noted that this informal process is not intended to deal with more serious legal costs disputes or to deal with the charging of "grossly excessive" fees the charging of which could, under section 50 of the 2015 Act, be considered to amount to professional misconduct by a solicitor or a barrister.

The current working focus remains very much on the phased commencement of the respective sections or Parts of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 and the effective roll-out of the key functions concerned over the coming period. Some of these functions such as the holding of public consultations on Legal Partnerships, Multi-Disciplinary Practices and certain aspects of the work of barristers under sections 118 to 120 of the Act have already commenced. The Chairperson and members of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, its Interim Chief Executive and my Department are working closely to ensure that we can successfully coordinate the identification of the necessary steps and commencements by the Department, and the delivery, by the Authority as the new independent statutory regulator, of the various remaining provisions concerned. The changeover to the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicator will, therefore, come into effect with the commencement of the relevant provisions of Part 10 of the 2015 Act. This is something for which detailed preparation is already being made by a specifically tasked joint working group chaired by my Department in conjunction with the Courts Service that is working to map out and oversee the various practical steps that have to be taken to get the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators up and running. This work is also intended to ensure that the relevant new legal costs adjudication processes, documentation, rules of court and IT systems can be put in place in a legally robust manner. Certain transitional arrangements that will apply to the coming on stream of the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicators and the modalities of processing any matters which may already have been referred for a taxation of legal costs are set out in sections 164 and 165 of the 2015 Act. In broad terms, this will be done on the basis that such referrals will be dealt with in accordance with the applicable law as it stood when they were initially made.

Commencement of Legislation

134. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when Part 7 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 relating to enduring powers of attorney shall be commenced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13449/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties and is being commenced on a phased basis. It is intended that significant progress will be made in 2017 on the implementation of the new decision-making support options provided for in the Act. New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental

Health Commission, must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act come into force. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from my Department, the Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service.

Part 7 of the Act provides for new enduring powers of attorney provisions that expand the powers provided for under the Powers of Attorney Act 1996 to include healthcare matters and to provide for oversight of attorneys. Until Part 7 of the Act has been commenced, enduring powers of attorney can continue to be created under the Powers of Attorney Act 1996.

Visa Applications

135. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will expedite a join family visa application for a person (detail supplied) whose application for a visa was made on 29 February 2016 and is still pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13476/17]

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 refused by the Visa Office in New Delhi on 16 March, 2017. The applicant has been informed and of the reasons for same.

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).

Visa Applications

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review a visa application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); the correct procedure to be followed by the persons who wish to appeal the decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13489/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 42 of 2 March 2017. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that no appeal has been submitted. Guidelines on the appeals procedure are available on the INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie).

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.

Garda Deployment

137. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when a resident garda will be provided in Rathdowney, County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13502/17]

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 the 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 or her Division.

Rathdowney Garda Station forms part of the Portlaoise Garda District which is within the wider Laois/Offaly Garda Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Laois/Offaly Division on the 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 296 and the strength of Portlaoise District was 162 of which 2 were assigned to Rathdowney Garda Station. There are also 19 Garda Reserves and 23 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí 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 to 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 further informed by the Commissioner that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, 838 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 29 of whom have been assigned to the Laois/Offaly 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 every Garda Division, including the Laois/Offaly 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.

Penalty Points System Data

138. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of fixed charge penalty point notices issued to drink-drivers detected at blood alcohol concentration, BAC, levels between 50 mg and 80 mg in each of the years 2012 to 2016; the number of drivers who paid the FCN within the time limit; the number of drivers summonsed to court for failing to pay the FCN; the number of drivers convicted; the number of driver licence numbers recorded on conviction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13508/17]

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 the prosecutions specified in the Deputy's question to court results. It follows that it is similarly not possible to ascertain the number of driver licence numbers recorded for the offence referred to in the question, where the offence specified results in a conviction.

State Visits

139. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has the final figures of the precise costs to the State in facilitating Prince Charles's visit here in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13510/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the allocation of necessary resources to ensure the safety of visiting dignitaries, having regard to the security considerations involved, and I as Minister have no direct role in the matter.

I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the total expenditure paid from the Garda Vote in respect of the visit of HRH Prince Charles to Donegal is €0.8m.

Visa Applications

140. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a join family visa in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13533/17]

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 information referred to was received by the Visa Office on 14 February 2017.

As explained in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 103 of 28 September 2016, there has been an exponential increase since the second quarter of 2015 in the number of such applications. 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. 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.

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 possible 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 INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Crime Levels

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to the rise in crime in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13543/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure the Deputy that Operation Thor is a nationwide initiative to tackle burglary and related criminal activity. It was designed and launched after I initiated a broad review of our response to burglary and it represents a major step-up in our response to criminals who have sought to target householders in many areas of the country.

An Garda Síochána carefully monitors the activities of criminal groups affecting all areas of the country, including Co. Kerry, and are implementing strong policing measures to disrupt and dismantle their networks. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the deployment of Garda resources to specific areas, but I am assured that Garda management constantly monitor the distribution of resources in the light of crime trends and overall policing needs. As the Deputy is aware, very significant resources have been provided to the Garda authorities, including an overtime allocation of €88.5 million in the current year, to support large-scale policing operations, including Operation Thor. If I might illustrate the scale of Garda activity against burglary and property crime – under Operation Thor we have seen more than 67,000 targeted checkpoints nationwide, and in the region of 4,000 arrests connected to a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences.

Operation Thor has particularly targeted mobile gangs engaged in burglary and related crimes and it is encouraging to note that since the launch of the operation in November 2015, the burglary figures have shown a significant downward trend. Indeed, the most recent CSO official recorded crime statistics for Q3 of 2016 show a decrease of 31% in burglary for the twelve months ending 30 September 2016 compared to the previous twelve month period. This reflects the success of the concerted Garda drive against crime being implemented under Op-

eration Thor. In fact, CSO figures for the Kerry Garda Division show a reduction in Burglary of 56% in the first nine months of 2016 when compared to the same period in 2015, coinciding with the introduction of Operation Thor.

As part of the concerted strategy to combat burglary, I made it a priority to secure the enactment of specific legislation targeting prolific burglars in the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015. These provisions are now available to Gardaí to support prosecutions arising from Operation Thor. The reduction in the volume of burglaries as a result of Operation Thor will not of course be indicated in the overall detection rate for burglary. However, I might add that the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Act was commenced a year ago and introduced the DNA database, which provides Gardaí with investigative links ('hits') between people and unsolved crimes, including burglaries. It is anticipated that this will assist in improving detection rates for burglary over the coming years.

Underpinning all of these measures is the Government's ongoing commitment 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. The Government plans 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 which is in train within An Garda Síochána. Approximately 300 appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve.

Private Security Authority Administration

142. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding applications that are under appeal with the private security authority in respect of a private security licence; if the applicant can operate until the appeals process is completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13573/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Private Security Authority, established under the Private Security Services Act 2004, as amended, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State. The Authority licenses both contractors and individual service providers. As the Deputy will be aware it is an independent body.

The 2004 Act sets out the relevant provisions in respect of the Authority's decisions. In general terms, in circumstances where a decision of the Authority is to refuse to renew a licence and that decision is appealed then the Authority's decision stands suspended pending the outcome of the appeal proceedings. Provided the licensee holds a valid licence at the time of the appeal he/she may continue to operate according to that licence. There are certain circumstances provided for where if the decision of the Authority is made on grounds that the safety or welfare of any persons may be at risk from the continuance in force of the licence then the licensee cannot continue to operate even after the lodging of an appeal. Where a new applicant appeals the refusal of a licence, the applicant cannot provide a security service during the appeal process as he/she does not hold a valid licence to provide such a service.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

143. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that persons whose work involves visiting different

schools, for example, a yoga instructor, must undergo separate Garda vetting in respect of each school they visit; her views on whether this is a waste of public resources; if she will arrange to put a system in place whereby such persons can be Garda vetted once for visits to different schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13577/17]

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

The Acts provide for a degree of flexibility which may lessen the administrative burden for the management of a school or other relevant organisation. Section 12 of the Acts makes provision for certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. The section also makes specific provision in respect of persons who may be employed on a recurring but non-continuous basis. The vetting obligations shall be regarded as satisfied where the registered organisation received a vetting disclosure in respect of the individual for the initial engagement.

The vetting process demands rigorous procedures to safeguard its integrity and to maintain the highest level of confidence by the public and organisations availing of the service. Given the importance of ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults, I believe that the current vetting requirements are not unreasonable.

Property Registration Authority Administration

144. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of an IT fault at the Dublin offices of the Property Registration Authority; when the fault was first detected; when the fault is likely to be repaired; the number of applications that have been delayed processing as a result of the fault; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13584/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised that the Deputy has been in contact with the Waterford office of the Property Registration Authority (PRA) in relation to an application for registration of property. The processing of this application and two other related applications were delayed as a result of a registration issue relating specifically to the folio concerned. I am informed that this issue was identified on 14 February 2017 and it has now been resolved. The processing of the application (and two related applications on this folio) is currently being expedited.

I am advised that the Authority wishes to assure the Deputy that there is not, nor has there been in the recent past, any ICT fault that has impacted on the processing of applications or the provision of services generally in any of the offices of the Property Registration Authority and I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the Deputy in this regard.

Courts Service

145. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her role in setting down the claim limit that applies to the Small Claims Court; and her plans to increase this limit. [13701/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): S.I. No. 519 of 2009, District Court (Small Claims) Rules 2009, provides the foundation for the small claims procedure which is governed by Rules of Court. The monetary limit for small claims is fixed by Rules of Court with concurrence by myself as Minister for Justice and Equality. Any amendment to Rules of Court is a matter for the relevant Court Rules Committee.

The Deputy may be aware that the limit of €2,000 which applies to claims made under the European small claims procedure will be increased under Regulation (EU) 2015/2421 of the European Parliament and of the Council to €5,000 with effect from 14 July 2017.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

146. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when it is proposed to begin the new round of community CCTV schemes as announced in budget 2017. [13735/17]

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. In this context, I expect to make an announcement shortly.

Naturalisation Applications

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13795/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was refused, for reasons provided to the person concerned, in a letter issued on 6 February 2017 advising of the decision.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. Indeed, the letter advising an applicant of a negative decision also informs them that they may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. The letter advises that, when considering making such a re-application, they should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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 I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are

in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13796/17]

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 processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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.

Naturalisation Eligibility

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed by a person (details supplied) whose initial application was refused due to previous offences; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13797/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act. Section 15 of the Act provides that the Minister may, in her absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation if satisfied that the statutory conditions for naturalisation are fulfilled. In particular, these conditions require that an applicant is of good character.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. Indeed, the letter advising an applicant of a negative decision also informs them that they may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. The letter advises that, when considering making such a re-application, they should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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 I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

Residency Permits

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the expected residency status in the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13798/17]

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 applications, which were received on 2 November 2016, are currently receiving attention and that the persons in question will be contacted in the coming weeks.

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

Naturalisation Applications

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); if his new address can be noted on his application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13799/17]

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 processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. The records have now been updated to reflect the new address of the person concerned.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision is likely to issue in respect of application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13800/17]

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 there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. An application for naturalisation was received from the person concerned in July 2016, however, the application was returned as it did not include the statutory application fee of €175.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory requirements. An on-line residency calculator is available on the website www.inis.gov.ie, which may be of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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.

Coroners Service

153. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the average waiting time for cases to be heard at each of the country's coroner courts in tabular form; the number of cases currently awaiting hearing at each court; the number of vacant coroner positions in each coroner's court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13815/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have no role with regard to the conduct of death investigations, including inquests held by coroners. The coroner, as an independent quasi-judicial officer, is solely responsible in that regard. While I am assured that coroners endeavour to hold inquests as expeditiously as possible, a variety of factors and circumstances - often outside the coroner's control - may sometimes cause delay. These would include the receipt by the coroner of the results of the post-mortem examination,

the receipt by the coroner of results of any tests carried out as part of the post-mortem process and the question of whether or not a criminal prosecution is being considered.

In these circumstances it is not possible to give an average time frame with regard to the opening or final determination of an inquest.

My Department does not hold information with regard to the number of inquests awaiting determination.

There are no current vacancies with regard to appointments to coroner jurisdictions under the provisions of the 1962 Coroners Act.

Legal Aid Service Reform

154. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she plans to introduce legislation to compel criminals to pay a contribution to their legal aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13861/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962 provides that free legal aid may be granted in certain circumstances for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. The grant of legal aid entitles the applicant to the services of a solicitor and, in certain circumstances, up to two counsel, in the preparation and conduct of his or her defence or appeal. The courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. An applicant must establish to the satisfaction of the court that their means are insufficient to enable them to pay for legal representation themselves. Furthermore, the court must also be satisfied that, by reason of the "gravity of the charge" or "exceptional circumstances", it is essential in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal aid. I have no function in these matters which are determined by the judiciary.

Work on the preparation of a draft General Scheme of a Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill is at an advanced stage in my Department. The key purpose of the legislation is to transfer the administration of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme to the Legal Aid Board and to give effect to Government Programme commitments in respect of criminal legal aid, including introducing a more rigorous and objective means testing system for criminal legal aid, provision for contributions, and new sanctions. It is my intention to seek approval of Government for the General Scheme of the Bill and submit it to the Oireachtas for pre-legislative scrutiny as early as is feasible in 2017.

Courts Service Administration

155. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has commissioned an annual study of court efficiency and sitting times, benchmarked against international standards, to provide accurate measurements for improving access to justice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13862/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to commission an annual study on court efficiency and sitting times as outlined by the Deputy and my Department has examined options to develop the most effective approach to implementing this commitment. It is intended that this study will be incorporated into a wider review of the administration of civil

justice which has been proposed by the President of the High Court and arrangements for the review, including the terms of reference, are currently being finalised.

Family Reunification Applications

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a family reunification application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13950/17]

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 application for family reunification in respect of the person concerned was received in May 2016 and referred to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) for investigation as required under Section 18 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended). The investigation is currently ongoing. In the interest of fairness to all applicants, applications received are dealt with in chronological order.

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.

Immigration Status

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of eligibility pursuant to section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13951/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 17th May 2012 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the person concerned pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Naturalisation Applications

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position in respect of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13955/17]

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

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While 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.

Family Reunification Applications

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in respect of an application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13956/17]

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 there is no record of an application as described by the Deputy from the person concerned.

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.

Crime Data

160. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of crimes reported in the Dublin 9 and Dublin 18 areas in the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13976/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation

and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Garda Remuneration

161. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to an issue regarding incremental pay increases within An Garda Síochána (details supplied); if she will ensure that this irregularity is rectified; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14049/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It has not been possible to finalise this reply in the time available. I will provide the information sought by the Deputy as soon as possible.

Migrant Integration

162. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the grants for integration projects are cut down to €600 million in her Department compared to €1,321 million in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14053/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As set out on the website of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (www.integration.ie), €1.386 million was spent on grants in 2015 but this sum includes over €457,000 for communities in which persons were resettled and over €389,000 under a European Social Fund (ESF) scheme. The call for applications for national funding which was advertised recently, in which €600,000 was given as the approximate amount to be spent each year, does not include resettlement and ESF expenditure, which is administered separately, and it is not the case therefore that there has been a cut in the amount available for grants to integration projects.

Departmental Staff Data

163. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentry Question No. 113 of 23 February, if she will provide details with regard to each suspension in tabular form (details supplied). [14055/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It has not been possible to respond to this question in the time available. I will contact the Deputy with further information as soon as possible.

Naturalisation Applications

164. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current wait times for applications for naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14100/17]

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

formed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it remains committed to meeting the target in place to process 70% of all standard non-complex cases within six months of receipt of applications.

However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that for a broad range of reasons some cases will take longer than others to process. It is a statutory requirement that, inter alia, applicants for naturalisation be of good character. In some instances that can be established relatively quickly and in other cases completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time. As a result there will always be a proportion of cases that take longer than the norm to process.

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.

State Pathology Service

165. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if all pathology cases conducted by a person (details supplied) in 2012 and 2013 will be reviewed; and if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed. [14109/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Office of the State Pathologist carries out work to provide independent expert evidence which may be used in the prosecution of offences such as homicides or in certain cases in inquests held by a coroner. In such cases the report of the pathologist is open to scrutiny.

As Minister for Justice and Equality, I have no role in criminal trials or in the running of inquests which are independent processes. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the operation of these processes in individual cases. Moreover, I am precluded from commenting on matters which may impinge on ongoing proceedings.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

166. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 76 of 16 February 2017, if the balance of refugees, 261 in total, to be resettled here from Lebanon by autumn 2017 have been identified already or if the process is ongoing. [14111/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The position is that the UNHCR has identified and proposed to Ireland sufficient cases to fill the balance (261 refugees) of the 2017 refugee resettlement quota (520 refugees). These cases are under consideration at present by the resettlement unit in the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration in this Department.

Departmental Legal Costs

167. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total amount spent externally by her Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitor firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, who provided services to her Depart-

ment for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14136/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

Year	Name of Practitioner	Total amount paid in euro
2015	McCarter and English LLP	2,931
2015	Margaret O'Driscoll, BL	7,955
2015	Lucy McRoberts, BL	7,995
2015	Emma Doyle, BL	4,307
2015	Sinead Drennan BL	4,612
2015	McDowell Purcell	34,809
2015	Dominic McGinn	92,250
2015	Conor Devally SC	47,047
2015	Jim Benson	9,471
2015	John Fitzgerald JC	21,709
2015	Karen O'Connor	7,872
2015	Lisa Daly BL	1,627
2015	Paul Greene	29,520
2015	Paul Carroll JC	21,525
2015	Siobhan Ni Chulachain	25,461
2016	Conor Devally SC	19,126
2016	John Fitzgerald JC	1,968
2015*		39,520
2016*		26,368
2017*		3,075

*I can advise that the following amounts have been paid by this Department to solicitors who provided legal advice to eligible applicants to the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-gratia scheme. All eligible applicants are required to sign a form of acceptance and a waiver before payment issues and they are encouraged to seek legal advice before signing. The total amounts paid per year from 2015 to date are included in the table. As over 600 files are involved in this scheme, it would take an inordinate amount of time to identify the solicitor involved in each particular case.

Bail Law

168. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the conditions for bail for those convicted of sexual assault offences; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14145/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure the Deputy that as part of the Government's response to crime, one of our major objectives is to focus on the key area of strengthening the law to get tougher on serious and repeat offenders. In that context, I published the Bail (Amendment) Bill in December 2016, to provide for stricter bail terms for repeat serious offenders and to strengthen Garda powers to deal with breaches of bail.

As the Deputy will be aware, a decision to grant bail in a particular case is a matter for the court, which is, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of its judicial functions. There is a constitutional presumption in favour of bail, since, in the eyes of the law, a person is innocent until proven guilty. Within that constitutional framework, and in accordance with the Programme for a Partnership Government, the new Bail Bill will improve the operation of the Bail system and make the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against crimes committed by persons on bail while also safeguarding the rights of the individual.

The new Bill specifically provides that the courts must have regard to persistent serious offending by an applicant for bail; it expands the conditions which a court may impose when granting bail, including a conditions requiring an accused person not to have contact with the victim of the alleged offence or any member of the victim's family and the imposition of a curfew. The Bail Bill will also provide that electronic monitoring may be imposed as a bail condition if the prosecution applies to the court for that condition.

In addition, the Bill will give the Garda Síochána new powers of arrest without warrant for a breach of bail conditions where it is necessary to arrest the person immediately to prevent absconding or to prevent harm, interference or intimidation to the victim or a witness.

There are also existing legislative provisions which provide for the monitoring and management of sex offenders following release from prison. Under the Sex Offenders Act 2001, convicted sex offenders must notify An Garda Síochána of their name and address as well as any subsequent changes to those details. The 2001 Act also provides for monitoring of certain sex offenders including through post release supervision by the Probation Service.

Ministerial Remuneration

169. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under her remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14568/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm that no overnight expense for staying in Dublin has been paid from my Department's Vote to a Minister or Minister of State during the period since 2011.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

170. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if diagnosed severe autism will be included on the criteria for a primary medical certificate. [12966/17]

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

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

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

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

- be without both hands or without both arms;

- be without one or both legs;

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

- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the fuel grant, the scheme is estimated to have cost of the order of €65m in 2016. This figure does not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in the respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

The disability criteria for the tax concessions available under the scheme have changed over time. When the scheme was first introduced in 1968, the legislation only allowed for one medical ground. In 1989, four new medical grounds were added and in 1994, one new medical ground was added.

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

Commencement of Legislation

171. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance his plans regarding the commencement of the section 46 flat rate addition amendment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13276/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 86A of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 (as inserted by Section 47 of the Finance Act 2016) is an enabling provision that allows me to exclude by Ministerial Order any specified agricultural sector where the business structures or models employed result in a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs borne by flat-rate farmers within that sector. I can make an order for exclusion where The Revenue Commission has carried out a review on a sector and I am satisfied that, because of the business structures, contractual arrangements or models in place in a particular sector, the application of the flat-rate addition within that sector has resulted in, and would otherwise continue to result in, a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over VAT on inputs incurred by flat-rate farmers in that sector. If it proves necessary to do so, I will make any orders required, but as indicated at Report Stage in the Dail, I will give any sectors affected adequate time to make the necessary changes to their business models and I do not envisage making a Ministerial Order to exclude any particular sector from the flat-rate scheme until the

latter part of 2017.

I am aware of evidence of business structures and contractual arrangements in the poultry sector that would be likely to result in an excess of flat rate addition payments to farmers over the VAT borne on their input costs, and I am advised by Revenue that they are in the process of meeting relevant parties in that sector to establish if they plan to unwind any structures and arrangements that are designed or likely to give rise to overcompensation of farmers for the VAT borne on their input costs. If Revenue are not satisfied that any such structures and arrangements will be unwound within an acceptable timeframe they will complete a review of the sector as provided for in the legislation. Upon reciept of such a review, if I am satisfied that a systemic excess has taken place in their sector, I will have no hesitation in making an order to exclude the sector from the flat-rate scheme.

Betting Regulations

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if there is legislation or rules on the number of bookmakers that can open in any town at the one time; the legislation there is on this issue at present; and his plans for new proposals in this area. [13761/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislation governing the licencing of bookmakers is contained within the Betting Acts 1931 to 2015. The enactment of the Betting (Amendment) Act 2015 was the first step towards updating the betting regulatory regime and in particularly put in place a regulatory framework for remote operators.

The Betting Acts 1931 to 2015 provide that the Revenue Commissioners may issue a Bookmakers' licence to a qualified person when the individual makes an appropriate application setting out the information required, is in possession of a Certificate of Personal Fitness issued within 21 days of the submission of the licence application, and pays the appropriate excise duty. In the case of a body corporate, each of the relevant officers must be in possession of a Certificate of Personal Fitness.

There is no prohibition on the number of bookmakers that can open in a town at any one time.

Tax Credits

173. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance if he has explored the possibility of introducing a disability tax credit similar to the blind persons tax credit; if so, the estimated costs of setting up such a tax credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14040/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy may be aware that there are currently a number of supports within the tax system available to disabled persons or to persons who provide care to disabled persons. These include the Blind Person's Tax Credit and the Incapacitated Child and Dependent Relative Tax Credits. Relief from tax is also available in relation to the costs incurred in employing persons to take care of incapacitated individuals and the cost of the incapacitated individual's medical expenses. Certain exemptions from Income Tax may also be available depending on the individual's circumstances, for example lump sum payments can be exempt from tax where paid by an employer because of injury or disability.

More detailed information on these types of measures is available from 'Revenue Leaflet IT12 General Guide to Taxation for People with Disabilities' which is available from the Rev-

enue website at http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it12.pdf.

It is not possible to provide the Deputy with an estimated cost for a general disability tax credit, were such a credit to be introduced, as this would depend on the eligibility criteria chosen. However it is my view that the tax system, which has as its primary function the collection of tax revenues to fund public expenditure, is not the most appropriate route through which to provide such supports. The tax system is limited in its ability to provide support to disabled individuals as tax measures can only benefit those whose incomes are high enough to pay tax and thus avail of any additional tax credit or relief. Direct expenditure measures can have a wider reach than taxation measures, and it is for this reason that direct expenditure is the main route through which assistance and services are provided by the State to individuals affected by disability.

National Debt

174. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the State's national debt in tabular form; the interest rate and redemption date on each component of the national debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12794/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Debt is the net debt incurred by the Exchequer after taking account of cash balances and other financial assets. Gross National Debt is the principal component of General Government Debt.

Details of the provisional and unaudited composition of Gross National Debt, its residual maturity and average interest rates as at end-2016 are set out in the following table.

Gross National Debt as at end December 2016			
Instrument	Outstanding Balance	Weighted Average Residual Maturity	Weighted Average Interest Rate
	€bn	Years	%
Government Bonds	121.6	11.1	3.7%1
EU-IMF Programme	50.3	11.22	2.1%2
State Savings	17.23	3	0.33%-1.5%3
Other Medium and Long-Term Debt	1.7	16.84	3.0%4
Short term debt	5.95	0.35	-0.3%5
Total Gross National Debt	196.7		
Sources: NTMA, CSO, Department of Finance			

The 2016 figures are provisional and unaudited. They are therefore subject to revision.

Rounding may affect totals. National Debt figures take account of the effect of currency hedging transactions.

Notes to table:

1. The nominal interest rate is displayed, which differs from the yield at issue.

2. EFSM loans are subject to maturity extensions designed to bring the original weighted average maturity to 19.5 years. It is not expected that Ireland will have to refinance any of its EFSM loans before 2027. However as the revised maturity dates of individual EFSM loans will only be determined as they approach their original maturity dates, the weighted average maturity figure above does not fully reflect the maturity extensions. Including certain assumptions for EFSM maturity extensions, the estimated residual weighted average maturity of EU-IMF Programme loans was 13 years at end-2016. The EU-IMF Programme interest rate is an estimated weighted average, euro equivalent interest rate.

3. State Savings Schemes also include money invested by depositors in the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) which does not form part of the National Debt but is part of other General Government Debt in the table. Taking into account POSB Deposits, total State Savings outstanding were €20.1 billion at end-December 2016. State Savings include products with original maturities ranging from 3 to 10 years. These products generally have a very high re-investment rate. Irrespective of the original term, NTMA State Savings products can be encashed on demand at any time - repayment takes 7 days. Prize bonds can be encashed when 90 days have elapsed after the purchase date. The interest rates shown are the maximum interest rates (AER) payable on the fixed term, fixed rate products available for purchase at end 2016.

4. The table shows the weighted average maturity and interest rate for Private Placements, Euro Medium Term Notes, and loans from the European Investment Bank and Council of Europe Development Bank.

5. The table shows the weighted average maturity and euro equivalent interest rate for Treasury Bills, Euro Commercial Paper, Exchequer Notes and Central Treasury Notes. The short-term debt outstanding balance also includes Borrowing from Ministerial Funds.

National Debt Servicing

175. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the annual interest rate of the debt he plans to redeem from the proceeds from the sale of a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12795/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have previously stated it is my position that the proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholdings in Irish banks, including AIB, will be used to reduce the outstanding level of public debt. The rationale for this approach is that the State's debt levels have been consistently identified as a significant risk factor by national and international experts, such as the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the Central Bank, the EU Commission, and the International Monetary Fund amongst others. The State's economic and fiscal interests will be best served by reducing the level of public debt and its associated risks.

It will be a matter for the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) to incorporate the proceeds of these sales into its future funding and debt management strategy at the appropriate time. The NTMA can adjust the funding strategy in the light of monies received.

At end-2016, the average interest rate on the outstanding stock of public debt was estimated to be just over 3 per cent.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

176. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary

Questions Nos. 235, 243 and 244 of 28 February 2017, if he will confirm, in respect of each financial institution involved in the Central Bank's tracker examination, the identity of the independent third parties overseeing the internal review process within the institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12807/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised me that under the framework of the Tracker Mortgage Examination lenders are required to appoint external independent third party assurers to oversee the Tracker Examination and to ensure that it is being carried out in line with the Central Bank s framework for the conduct of the Tracker Examination. However, the Central Bank has also advised that it is not in a position to comment on the third parties that individual lenders have appointed to oversee their review process within each institution due to confidentiality requirements under Central Bank legislation as this is lender specific supervisory information.

Revenue Commissioners Audits

177. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of audits conducted by the Revenue Commisioners in 2015 and 2016, by county, in tabular form; the average time in each county in each year for the audit process to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12843/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that it undertakes a broadly based programme of compliance interventions that aims to support a strong voluntary tax compliance culture, identify and tackle compliance risks, effectively combat and sanction tax evasion and fraud and minimise the burden on the compliant taxpayer. The compliance interventions undertaken by Revenue, which are risk focused, range from lighter touch non-audit interventions to in-depth investigations with a view to criminal prosecution for serious tax and customs fraud and evasion. Audits are, therefore, one of a range of compliance interventions undertaken by Revenue.

I am also advised by Revenue that statistics in relation to Revenue audits are not kept by reference to county. However the following table shows the number of audits and duration of completed in 2015 broken down by Revenue Districts and as can be seen from the table, equates to an approximate county breakdown in many instances. Also shown is the number of non-audit interventions (risk management interventions) for the same period. Final figures for 2016 are not available yet and will be provided directly to the Deputy as soon as they are available.

The length of time taken to conclude an audit will vary from cases to case. I am advised by Revenue that the data can be skewed by outlier cases. Furthermore, the duration of audits depends on a number of factors, including the complexity of the matters under audit and the extent to which there may be a dispute as to any tax technical matter involved, the level of co-operation from the taxpayer and/or the tax advisor, whether there is agreement on the level of penalty that should apply in the context of any settlement and the ability of the taxpayer to pay the tax, interest and penalty arising in the context of a settlement. Taxpayers who disagree with the findings of Revenue have a number of options including internal or external review of the conduct of the audit, an appeal to the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) or recourse to the courts. These processes will contribute to the duration of an audit.

Revenue District(s)/ Divisions	Number of audits closed in 2015	Average number of days open	Number of risk management interventions closed in 2015
Dublin Districts	1,684	374	28,699
Galway City/ Roscommon District	274	374	4,177
Galway County District	268	369	5,998
Mayo District	238	215	2,322
Sligo District(includes Sligo/Leitrim/Longford)	203	294	3,129
Donegal District	242	247	3,076
Westmeath/Offaly District	226	409	3,265
Louth District	202	232	3,491
Cavan/Monaghan District	183	244	3,538
Tipperary District	206	362	2,320
Kilkenny District(includes Kilkenny/Carlow/ Laois)	367	154	3,551
Waterford District	221	332	2,081
Wexford District	216	315	2,439
Wicklow District	196	431	1,348
Kildare District	245	268	2,203
Meath District	297	291	3,382
Cork Districts	626	419	9,428
Limerick District	303	222	2,881
Clare District	174	286	2,402
Kerry District	120	356	2,393
Large Cases Division	127	398	5,112

Vehicle Registration

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding VRT on imported cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12848/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I presume the Deputy is referring to the recent Advocate General Opinion in relation the Court of Justice of the European Union Case C-522/15 and some of the newspaper reports arising from that opinion.

Firstly, I would like to clarify the background. The EU Commission have purported that Ireland has not fulfilled its obligations under Article 56 (freedom to provide services) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union due to the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) treatment

of vehicles that are brought into the State on a temporary basis.

The Case was heard in the Grand Chamber of the Court of Justice of the European Union on 22 November 2016. The Court has not given its ruling yet. However, the Advocate General delivered his opinion on the Case on 2 March 2017. In his opinion the Advocate General proposed that the Court should find that the action brought by the Commission was well founded.

However, I must strongly emphasise that the Advocate General's Opinion is not binding on the Court of Justice. It is the role of the Advocates General to propose to the Court, in complete independence, a legal solution to the cases for which they are responsible. The Judges of the Court now begin their deliberations in this case and judgment will be given at a later date - normally in 2 to 3 months. In cases such as this it is not exceptional that the Court take a different position to the Advocate General.

While some news outlets understood the status and implication of the Advocate General's Opinion, the newspaper the Deputy refers to made an error in both the headline and the article itself. I'm advised that the newspaper has now amended its online edition to reflect the true facts.

Tax Credits

179. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the incapacitated child tax credit and the dependent relative tax credit; the conditions necessary for a person to apply and the amount available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12932/17]

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the uptake levels of the incapacitated child tax credit; his views on the need for a public awareness campaign to improve the uptake of this tax credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13092/17]

222. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons availing of the incapacitated child tax credit for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [13546/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179, 182 and 222 together.

The incapacitated child tax credit and the dependent relative tax credit are two separate and distinct tax credits.

The entitlement to the incapacitated child tax credit is provided for in section 465 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997 (as amended). This tax credit is €3,300 per qualifying child for 2017 and a taxpayer is entitled to the tax credit for a year if it is proven that he or she had a permanently incapacitated living child:-

- under 18 years of age, or

- over 18 years who is permanently incapacitated from maintaining himself/herself and became permanently incapacitated either before reaching 21 years, or had become so incapacitated after reaching the age of 21 years but while receiving full-time instruction at any university, college, school or other educational establishment.

To establish entitlement to this credit in respect of any child, medical evidence is required to confirm both the extent of the incapacity, and whether the incapacity permanently prevents the child from being able to maintain himself or herself independently when over the age of 18

years. Once confirmation of entitlement has been provided with the initial claim, the credit will be awarded to the eligible taxpayer in subsequent tax years provided the relevant conditions continue to be met.

As regards a public awareness campaign to improve the uptake of the incapacitated child tax credit, I am advised by Revenue that they have regular contact with relevant Government bodies and agencies, and voluntary bodies, about the incapacitated child tax credit. Those contacts include regular updating of information to the Citizens Information Board for their website Citizensinformation.ie. Those updates include information about the credit, the conditions for claiming the credit, how to claim it and the necessary supporting evidence required. The approach towards raising awareness of the incapacitated child tax credit is in keeping with other initiatives undertaken by Revenue to publicise taxpayers' entitlements to tax credits and reliefs which included sending a targeted, written reminder, late last year, to almost 140,000 taxpayers who had not claimed any additional tax credits in the previous four years. Revenue is always open to exploring ways in which awareness of the credit may be increased.

In relation to the trend in the number of persons availing of the incapacitated child tax credit for the years 2011 to 2017, I am advised by Revenue that the trend in the number of claims, and associated costs, for the incapacitated child tax credit is available in the Costs of Tax Expenditures Table on the Revenue Statistics webpage at

http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/costs-expenditures.html.

The information provides an annual breakdown of the cost to the Exchequer and the associated numbers claiming the "Additional Credit for Incapacitated Child" for the years 2004 to 2014; which are the years for which complete PAYE and self-employed income tax filing data are available. The published information will be updated in due course as newer data, including from the 2015 Form 11 for self-employed cases, is available. However, despite the absence of complete information for 2015 onwards, Revenue has also advised that there is more timely information available on claims in respect of PAYE taxpayers in employment. That data reflects the number of PAYE taxpayers with the incapacitated child tax credit on their record, irrespective of whether the taxpayer has the earning capacity to use some or all of the credit.

The comparison of the published website data (PAYE and self-employed taxpayers who have used all or some of the incapacitated child credit) up to 2014, and provisional data for PAYE taxpayers only up to 2017, is as follows:

Year	PAYE taxpayers in employment with the credit on their record	PAYE and self-employed taxpayers: claims giving rise to a cost to the Exchequer (years for which complete data is available)
2013	14,682	17,700
2014	15,292	20,300
2015	15,673	
2016	15,890	
2017	15,893	

The entitlement to the dependent relative tax credit is provided for in section 466 of the TCA 1997.

The dependent relative tax credit is €70 for 2017. However, if the income of the depen-

dent relative exceeds the maximum amount payable for the State Pension (Contributory) plus an additional €280 in the year of assessment, which amounts to €14,504 for 2017, there is no entitlement to the credit.

The conditions for entitlement to the tax credit are that an individual must prove that he or she maintains, at his/her own expense, a:

- relative, including a relative of his spouse or civil partner, who is unable due to old age or infirmity to maintain him/herself,

- widowed parent of the claimant or of the claimant's spouse or civil partner, whether incapacitated or not, or

- son or daughter, or a child of his/her civil partner who resides with the claimant and on whose services the claimant is compelled to depend on due to old age or infirmity.

The dependent relative tax credit cannot be claimed for a child if the incapacitated child tax credit is claimed. The dependent relative tax credit continues to be awarded to the eligible taxpayer in subsequent tax years provided the conditions continue to be met.

Details in the respect of the number of claims, and associated costs, for the dependent relative tax credit are available in the Costs of Tax Expenditures Table on the Revenue Statistics webpage at http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/costs-expenditures.html.

Tax Collection

180. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have discretion to allow tax defaulters who have built up debts to some extent due to mental illness or addiction to alcohol or drugs but who are now recovering, subject to independent medical assessment and verification, to be able to repay their liabilities to an agreed programme and timescale without necessarily being loaded with sometimes punitive levels of interest; if not, if he will examine this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13030/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that as regards any element of tax default, details of how a taxpayer can correct any errors that have been made in or remedy any omissions from any tax return they have filed are set out in Revenue's Code of Practice for Revenue Audit and other Compliance Interventions (the Code), which has recently been updated. More details, including the full Code are available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

Revenue will work with taxpayers towards dealing with tax debts, no matter how they might arise, in a way that has regard to the need to support a strong voluntary tax compliance culture, the need to ensure a level playing field for all taxpayers and has appropriate regard for the circumstances of the taxpayer in any given situation. In this latter context I am further advised that it is Revenue practice to respond sensitively to the type of circumstances outlined by the Deputy.

Revenue's ability to arrive at a mutually acceptable arrangement will be predicated on open and honest engagement by the taxpayer and by timely compliance for future tax debts as they arise. Payment of arrears of tax or payment by way of a phased payment arrangement will include interest, which is a statutory charge legislated for by the Oireachtas and provided for in Section 1080 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. I am satisfied that collection of interest by

Revenue is a key element in reflecting the value of money forgone by the Exchequer where a taxpayer does not pay what is due on time and is also vital in supporting the efforts of the vast majority of taxpayers who are voluntarily and fully compliant.

Mortgage Book Sales

181. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the rights of mortgage holders in respect of the ownership or changed ownership of their mortgage; and the way in which a person may seek this information. [13090/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, when a consumer takes out a loan from a regulated lender it is subject to all the relevant Irish and EU consumer protections. I understand from the Central Bank that most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm.

It is important to highlight that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower's rights and obligations under the original contract. If a borrower is unsure whether their loan can be sold on by the original lender to another firm, they should check the terms and conditions of the loan agreement or contact the original lender.

When a loan is sold on to another regulated entity, the relevant Irish and EU consumer protections continue to apply. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing) Act 2015 ensures that borrowers retain the same rights as they had prior to the sale of the loan. These include the various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation in July 2016.

In addition, Provision 3.11 of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 requires that, where a regulated lender intends to transfer all or part of its regulated activities to another regulated entity, it must provide advance notification to both the Central Bank and affected consumers. Since the enactment of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing) Act 2015 the original lender must now provide a consumer with at least 2 months' notice before transferring all or part of its loan book covered by the Code to another person, including where the transferee is an unregulated entity. Where the transferee is an unregulated entity, the Code now requires that the regulated lender also notify the consumer of the regulated entity that will be 'servicing' the loan for the unregulated entity. Furthermore, in the event that there is a change in the regulated credit servicing firm, the existing firm must also notify the Central Bank and the consumer in advance, in accordance with the timelines set out under Provision 3.11 of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code.

Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 179.

Mortgage Interest Relief Extension

183. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the plan which he announced in budget 2017 to extend mortgage interest relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13124/17]

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.

Credit Union Regulation

184. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of credit unions that, as at 31 January 2017, have had their AGMs delayed by the Central Bank for more than nine months. [13153/17]

185. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the Central Bank's power under section 78(4) of the Credit Union Act 1997 (details supplied), in view of the fact that a number of credit unions have had their AGMs delayed by the Central Bank for periods exceeding the maximum postponement period of nine months as stated in the Act. [13154/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 and 185 together.

The Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for the regulation of credit unions registered under the Credit Union Act, 1997 (1997 Act), as amended. In accordance with Section 78(2) of the 1997 Act, credit unions are required to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM), within four months of the end of the financial year. I have been informed by the Central Bank that in relation to the holding of AGMs by credit unions in accordance with Section 78(2) of the 1997 Act, the Central Bank works closely with credit unions on a case by case basis to resolve any regulatory issues arising before a credit union holds its AGM. In this regard the Central Bank suggests that members should seek information from their individual credit union regarding the proposed timing of their AGM. Under section 78(4) of the 1997 Act the Central Bank may direct a credit union to postpone, for a period not exceeding nine months, the holding of the AGM. However, the Central Bank informs me that at present, no credit union has been directed by the Central Bank to postpone the holding of their AGM. I have been further informed by the Central Bank that as at 31 January 2017, there were 13 credit unions that had not held AGMs for more than 9 months. As at 15 March 2017, this

number has reduced to 12, representing approximately 4% of the 286 active credit unions. The Central Bank expects that the number of credit unions with AGMs outstanding will continue to reduce in the coming weeks, as a number of these AGMs are due to be scheduled. It is the responsibility of any credit union that has not held its AGM, to ensure that all regulatory issues are addressed so that any outstanding AGMs can be held as soon as possible. The Central Bank will continue to work closely with all of those credit unions to ensure that they address any regulatory issues so that their AGMs can take place.

Any actions taken by the Central Bank are taken in the interests of credit union members, the protection of their savings and in the interests of the orderly and proper regulation of the business of a credit union in line with our statutory mandate.

Banks Recapitalisation

186. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans regarding the proceeds of a proposed dividend from a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13158/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) holds the AIB shares on behalf of the State as part of its Directed portfolio. Dividend payments from the State's shareholding in the banks are therefore made in the first instance to the ISIF.

It is important to note that payments from the ISIF to the Exchequer arising from the proceeds of the disposal of the State's shareholdings in the Banks, including any dividends arising, are provided for under Section 47, (4) of the NTMA (Amendment) Act 2014. This legislation allows the Minister to direct the NTMA to make such payments to the Exchequer in respect of the proceeds of any such disposal or to take other steps as set out in the section in respect of such proceeds.

As I have previously stated it is my position that the proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholdings in Irish banks, including AIB, will be used to reduce the outstanding level of public debt.

Sale of Aer Lingus

187. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount of the proceeds from the sale of the State's stake in Aer Lingus; and the use for which the proceeds of the sale were used. [13159/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Connectivity Fund was established as a sub-fund of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) to invest the €335 million proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus with the aim of enabling and enhancing Ireland's physical, virtual and energy connectivity.

The ISIF has completed the first two investments from this fund with a combined value of €57m.

- ISIF announced a $25 million (c. €22 million) equity investment in Aqua Comms DAC, the operator of Ireland's first dedicated subsea fibre-optic network. The cable lands in Killala County Mayo and interconnects New York, Dublin and London. Aqua Comms is a provider of data connectivity and bandwidth infrastructure services for content providers, cloud-based net-

works, data centres, IT companies and the global media. Its network will be used by major multinational technology and telecoms companies to provide fast, secure data connections between Ireland, the US and UK and will enable the continued growth of the Irish digital economy.

- ISIF also rolled an existing (National Pensions Reserve Fund) commitment in daa plc's public bond, which was issued in 2008 (repayable in 2018), into a €35 million commitment in a new 2028 public bond issuance by daa, the operator of Dublin and Cork Airports. This continues ISIF's role as a long-term, strategic, domestic investor in daa. Given the nature of the underlying business of daa, and the fact that the new bond issuance provides the underpinning long-term financing for the company, the ISIF commitment to the 2028 bond is considered suited to inclusion under the Connectivity Fund.

Several other Connectivity Fund investment opportunities are currently being assessed under the ISIF's "double bottom line" mandate, which is to seek both commercial return and economic impact. These connectivity opportunities include potential investments in energy, air, sea and further data connectivity projects and businesses seeking to expand and enhance Ireland's international links.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Administration

188. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if persons eligible for the help-to-buy scheme are paid in one lump sum by the Revenue Commissioners or on a phased basis through their tax; if so, the period over which; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13165/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislative provisions for the Help to Buy incentive are set out in section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA), as inserted by section 9 of the Finance Act 2016. The incentive applies for the period from 19 July 2016 to 31 December 2019.

I can confirm that a qualifying refund under Help to Buy is paid in one lump sum by Revenue. A first-time buyer or self-builder will need to apply and claim online on http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/reliefs/htb/index.html. Claims are verified by either the purchaser's builder ("qualifying contractor") or their solicitor in the case of a self build, and once verified, the refund is paid.

Commercial Property

189. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fact that commercial property investors are predominately international REITs and equity funds and that prime office rents increased by 14% in the fourth quarter of 2016; if his Department conducted a risk analysis of a potential bubble in the commercial real estate sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13190/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): According to market research published this week by Savills, commercial property investment in 2016 was dominated by institutional investors and real estate investment trusts (REITS), who accounted for approximately 80 per cent of total investment turnover.

Over the past two years, Ireland's commercial real estate market has been characterised by ongoing divestment by private equity holders who, having entered the market earlier in the

price recovery cycle, are now experiencing yield compression and exiting their positions by re-trading properties to institutional investors who are willing to accept lower yields for prime assets. Savills reports that private equity firms' share of total turnover value has fallen from 53 per cent in 2012 to 12 per cent in 2016.

Overall, this change in composition of real estate dynamics marks a positive development in that it reflects a shift towards a longer-term focused investor base, rather than the highly yield-sensitive short-term private equity investment which characterised the landscape immediately post-crisis.

The continued rise in office rents reflects ongoing growth in economic activity and employment and the associated record level of office take-up over the last number of years. The growth in demand for office space and the increase in prime office rents has induced a significant pick-up in construction activity much of which is pre-funded or secured by forward-purchase agreements. According to CBRE, approximately 77,000 sq.m of office space was constructed in 2016, with a further 388,000 sq.m of office space currently under construction. This expansion in construction activity should help to alleviate some of the inflationary pressure in the office rental market. In addition, the strong granted planning pipeline indicates that the supply of office space has the potential to expand to meet growing demand over the next number of years.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department continues to monitor developments in the Commercial Real Estate market on an ongoing basis. As part of its financial stability mandate, the Central Bank also monitors development in the sector.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

190. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank is currently investigating the incorrect disclosure in advertisements of annual percentage rates by certain financial institutions; the precise nature of the investigation; the institutions concerned, the period covered and the credit products involved; if the advertised Annual Percentage Rate, APR, understated or overstated the actual APR in each case; if the Central Bank is satisfied that consumers were actually charged the correct rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13215/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand from the Central Bank that it is engaging with a small number of lenders regarding the incorrect disclosure of Annual Percentage Rates (APRs) to customers on certain credit products. Certain lenders identified issues with the APRs they had disclosed to customers on pre-sale material in relation to credit cards and notified the Central Bank, as required under the Consumer Protection Code. The Central Bank then requested a review of APR calculations on other credit products by these lenders and requested other lenders to confirm that calculations were in line with the method prescribed by the Consumer Credit Directive.

The Central Bank has made it clear that while the APRs disclosed were incorrect in these cases, the borrowing rates charged were in line with the borrowing rates disclosed. From the Central Bank's perspective therefore the consumer protection issue relates to incorrect disclosure of key information, rather than overcharging. I have been informed that all relevant lenders have implemented steps to correct the calculation of APR disclosed in pre-sale documentation to consumers. The Central Bank have informed me that they are not in a position to disclose specifics on the firms concerned and have also informed me that they are not in a position to disclose specifics on the time period covered at this stage.

Credit Union Restructuring

191. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the amalgamations of credit unions; when approvals for amalgamations are expected to be completed; if credit unions involved in the process will be approved for costs incurred in the amalgamation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13216/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On 1 January 2013 the Credit Union Restructuring Board - ReBo, was established on a statutory basis. ReBo was established to facilitate and oversee the restructuring of credit unions on a voluntary, incentivised and time-bound basis. The objectives of the restructuring process are to underpin the stability and long-term viability of credit unions and the sector at large and to provide an opportunity for stronger credit unions to develop a more sustainable business model. This Government provided €250 million in the Credit Union Fund as a source of financial support for credit unions restructuring under ReBo.

In October 2015 a detailed review of the work of ReBo was carried out under section 43 of the 2012 Act to examine whether or not ReBo had completed the performance of its functions. This review noted that ReBo's work was still ongoing and recommended that the final date for a credit union to receive a letter of offer from ReBo should be extended from 31 December 2015 to 31 March 2016. This extension provided additional time for credit unions considering entering the restructuring process to make an application in good time. A further review carried out in October 2016 concluded that ReBo expected to have completed the performance of its functions by 31 March 2017.

During its lifetime, 82 restructuring projects involving 156 credit unions with total assets in excess of €6 billion have been completed. As part of the restructuring process qualifying costs incurred by those credit unions were reimbursed by ReBo. Any potential amalgamations not completed under ReBo will pass to the Central Bank and any credit union seeking to undertake a voluntary merger is being advised to contact the Central Bank in this regard.

I am expecting a final review of the work of ReBo in the coming weeks, which I believe will demonstrate that ReBo has completed the performance of its functions in line with the 2012 Act.

Tax Avoidance

192. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have assessed the value of the over claim of flat rate addition in the poultry sector between 2004 and 2016; and if he will provide a breakdown of these values by year for the period. [13283/17]

193. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners review of tax avoidance schemes in the poultry sector will be conducted at processor level in addition to at farmer and grower level. [13284/17]

194. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the sector or sectors in which the mechanism of over claiming flat rate addition is being operated; if it is exclusive to the poultry sector; and if he will order a review or investigation of other sectors based on the possible cost to the Exchequer of flat rate addition over claims in other sectors. [13285/17]

195. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the claim that the essential element in the over claim of flat rate addition in the poultry sector is in fact not the

farmer or grower but the processor that reportedly drives the process by artificially inflating feed prices. [13286/17]

196. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if farmers, growers and processors in the poultry sector that currently overclaim flat rate addition will be allowed to continue to overclaim flat rate addition while he waits for the Revenue Commissioners to continue its review of the sector. [13287/17]

197. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if farmers, growers and processors that to date have not over claimed flat rate addition should now over claim flat rate addition until such time as the Revenue Commissioners completes its review of the poultry sector and he reaches a decision on the way forward. [13288/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 to 197, inclusive, together.

Taxpayers are entitled to structure their businesses and undertake their business activities in the most tax efficient manner permitted by the law. Where taxpayers minimise their tax liabilities or, as is alleged in the case of the poultry sector, use the interaction of the flat-rate scheme for farmers and the normal VAT system to maximise their level of VAT input recovery and do so within the law no 'overclaiming' of VAT on input costs arises. Unregistered farmers apply a flat-rate addition to the value of the agricultural goods or services supplied to a VAT registered business; they cannot apply a higher rate than that provided in law or apply it to a value other than the price charged for the supply of the goods or services. It follows that they cannot at a later date seek to adjust upwards the amount of the flat-rate addition added at the time of the supply.

The flat-rate addition, currently 5.4%, is reviewed each year and adjusted where necessary to ensure that farmers that are not registered for VAT are compensated at the aggregate level for the unrecoverable VAT borne on their input costs.

However, while business structures and contractual arrangements in an agricultural sector may be lawful they are not acceptable if they result in a systematic overcompensation of farmers for the VAT borne on their input costs. Accordingly, when this matter was brought to my attention I introduced a provision in Finance Act 2016 that enables me to exclude, by Ministerial Order, any specified agricultural sector where the business structures or models employed result in a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs borne by flat-rate farmers within that sector. If it proves necessary to do so, I fully intend to make any order required to exclude any sector from the flat rate scheme.

While there is evidence that business structures and contractual arrangements have emerged in the poultry sector that would be likely to result in an excess of flat rate addition payments to farmers over the VAT borne on their input costs, no economic analysis of the level of VAT recovery in the poultry sector has been undertaken. With regard to the question about 'artificially inflating feed prices', the Deputy will be aware that prices are a matter to be agreed between buyers and sellers and that sellers will be in a position to point to a range of factors influencing price levels, including quality, consistency, traceability, etc.

I am advised by The Revenue Commissioners that following enactment of the provision referred to above officials met with the Irish Farmers Association and are in the process of meeting relevant parties in the poultry sector to establish if they plan to unwind any structures and arrangements that are designed or likely to give rise to overcompensation of farmers for the VAT borne on their input costs. If Revenue is not satisfied that any such structures and arrangements will be unwound within an acceptable timeframe they will complete a review of the

sector as provided for in Section 86A of the VAT Consolidation Act, 2010 (inserted by Section 47 of Finance Act 2016). I gave a commitment at Report Stage in the Dáil when discussing this provision that I would provide the industry with adequate time to make the necessary changes to their business models and that I did not envisage making a Ministerial Order to exclude any particular sector from the flat-rate scheme until the latter part of 2017. I intend to honour that commitment, but I also want to reiterate my commitment to make such an Order if it proves necessary to do so.

In relation to other agricultural sectors, I am not aware of any evidence that similar structures and contractual arrangements have been put in place. I am advised by Revenue that it is enquiring into business practices in other agricultural sectors for evidence of such business structures and have asked the Irish Farmers Association to advise them if they become aware of any such structures.

Mortgage Interest Rates

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if each State supported bank offers, in certain circumstances, an interest rate to an existing mortgage customer which is outside of the advertised rates for that particular category of customer including, for example, in a situation in which a customer has informed the bank that he or she is switching to another lender; if the Central Bank has a view on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13299/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have received the following responses to the Deputy's Question, from AIB and PTSB:

AIB

"AIB s approach to Mortgage pricing has been to pass on pricing reductions to both new and existing customers ensuring existing customers are treated fairly. In a very small number of circumstances the bank may provide a rate outside the advertised rates where there is a compelling justification to do so from a customer or commercial perspective. AIB would emphasise that this is not a general practice and the case numbers involved are negligible

PTSB

"Permanent tsb does not offer rates that are different to the rates that are advertised on either our website or in branch.

The only instance where existing customers can avail of a lower rate is if they avail of permanent tsb's MVR switch offer. This is the offering from the bank to all our standard variable rate (SVR) Customers who can move from a rate of 4.5% to a managed variable rate of 3.7% to 4.3%. Our managed variable rates will vary depending on the amount owed and the value of the property in question. The highest rate charged (for customers whose mortgage is equal to or greater than 90% of the value of their home) is 4.3%, 0.2% less than our current Standard Variable Rate (SVR). Full details of the offering is available on the link to our website below:

https://www.permanenttsb.ie/borrowing/mortgages/mvr-switch-offer/."

The Central Bank of Ireland has also provided the following response:

"The Central Bank does not have a statutory role to prescribe the rates that mortgage lenders charge on their loans. The pricing of mortgage loans is a commercial decision for the lender.

The Central Bank requires 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 switch to a new product) are treated in accordance with these requirements in the context of the product they have chosen.

Following a public consultation, on 21 July 2016, the Central Bank announced the introduction of a number of increased protections for variable rate mortgage holders. These enhanced measures, which are provided for in an Addendum to the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (which can be found at: https://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/processes/consumer-protection-code/Documents/2016.07.21%20Addendum%20to%20the%20Code.pdf), and effective from 1 February, require lenders to explain to borrowers how their variable interest rates have been set, including in the event of an increase. The measures also enhance the level of information to be provided to borrowers about other mortgage products their lender provides that could provide savings for the borrower and signpost borrowers to the CCPC's mortgage switching tool. Lenders must now also clearly outline where they apply a different approach to setting the variable interest rate for different cohorts of borrowers and the reasons for the different approach."

Property Tax

199. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Revenue Commissioners is adopting a position when dealing with self employed people who are due a tax refund and farmers who are claiming VAT back on capital expenditure, whereby they deduct the property tax from this repayment, even though the individuals had already signed up to a payment instruction to pay by monthly instalments on direct debit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13314/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Where a taxpayer is due a refund of tax, Revenue is entitled under the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to offset the refund amount or a portion thereof to satisfy any outstanding tax debt, including Local Property Tax (LPT).

Where a property owner has a functioning payment plan in place for example, direct debit, deduction from salary/pension or single debit authority (SDA) then the refund should not be offset by Revenue. Revenue has advised me that the person(s) to whom the Deputy is referring in his question should immediately contact the LPT Helpline at 1890 200 255 to have the matter investigated. I am assured by Revenue that any amount of tax incorrectly offset will be refunded.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

200. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm that in line with the one person, one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid, that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13323/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's query, I have been advised by the 18 bodies under the aegis of my Department that no public servant that is a member of a State Board or agency under the control of my department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees. I am advised that one serving member of the board of ReBo received board fees in error in 2013 and that following advice from Department of Public Expenditure and Reform these fees were discontinued and no reimbursement was

requested.

Legislative Programme

201. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the proposed legislation following the receipt of submissions as part of the public consultation on a sugar sweetened drinks tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13335/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As stated in Budget 2017, I intend to introduce a tax on sugar sweetened drinks in April 2018 to coincide with the introduction of a similar tax in the UK.

An examination of the proposed tax, including estimates of projected yields, are contained in the excise Tax Strategy Group paper (TSG 16/02) which is available on my Department's website.

A public consultation process opened on Budget night seeking the views of interested parties on the make up of the tax which ran until 3rd January 2017. Some 30 submissions were received, all of which are also available to view on my Department's website together with the public consultation document.

Final decisions have yet to be made on the rate and scope of the tax. I intend that the legislation providing for the tax on sugar sweetened drinks will be included in the Finance Bill 2017.

Fiscal Data

202. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, using the most up-to-date economic and fiscal information available, an estimate of the final deficit as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, GDP, for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13341/17]

204. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, using the most up-to-date economic and fiscal information available, an estimate of the debt to Gross Domestic Product, GDP, ratio at the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13343/17]

216. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a revised estimate of Ireland's gross and net debt to Gross Domestic Product, GDP, ratio, in view of the publication by the Central Statistics Office of Quarterly National Accounts Quarter 4 2016 and Year 2016 (Preliminary) on 9 March 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13483/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 202, 204 and 216 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, estimates of gross debt, net debt and the deficit were published by my Department in the documentation accompanying the 2017 Budget last October. Updated figures are being prepared by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), in cooperation with my Department. This will be transmitted to Eurostat in the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) notification tables (also known as the Maastricht Returns) at the end of March. Following a clarification process by Eurostat this data will be made public just after mid-April. At the same time my Department is also preparing for Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2017. This will

take full account of any updated assumptions including figures published by the CSO as part of the government finance statistics release.

However, while updates of the nominal amount have to await the completion of the process described above, the below figures show the impact of the higher 2016 GDP figure in the CSO's recent release on the general government gross and net debt, as well as the general government deficit figure for 2016. However, the Deputy should be aware that the GDP data for 2016 will be subject to revision as part of the CSO's compilation of the National Income and Expenditure data in June this year.

(as a % of GDP at current market prices)	2016 (as at Budget 2017)	2016 (as at March 2017)	Percentage Point Change
General Government Gross Debt	76.0	75.1	0.9
General Government Net Debt	66.0	65.4	0.7
General Government Deficit	0.9	0.9	0.01

Fiscal Data

203. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, using the most up-to-date economic and fiscal information available, an estimate of the fiscal space for 2018, 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13342/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Estimates of the gross and net fiscal space for the period 2018 to 2020 can be found in Table A7 Annex 2 of the Budget 2017 book. For convenience, the gross and net fiscal space for the period 2018 to 2020 are set out below.

€ billions	2018	2019
Gross Fiscal Space	1.8	3.2
Net Fiscal Space	1.2	2.7

The calculation of the fiscal space depends on a number of moving parts. These include figures for general government expenditure, general government gross fixed capital formation, GDP deflators, reference rates and convergence margins.

The first official estimates of general government expenditure and gross fixed capital formation for 2016 are currently being compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), in cooperation with my Department. These will be transmitted to Eurostat in the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) notification tables (also known as the Maastricht Returns) at the end of March. Following a clarification process by Eurostat these data will be made public around mid-April. These data may be subject to revision when the CSO compiles the annual national accounts in June, and an updated EDP transmission takes place at end-September.

As Ireland is not yet at its medium term budgetary objective of a structural deficit of 0.5 per cent of GDP, the fiscal space is calculated in line with the potential growth rate of GDP less a convergence margin. The European Commission will set out the GDP deflator and the reference rate of potential growth in its Spring forecast due to be published in May. The Commission's Spring forecast will also contain the information necessary to calculate the convergence margin.

Following the publication of these data, my Department will compile revised projections of fiscal space out to 2021 and publish these in the Summer Economic Statement in June of this year.

Question No. 204 answered with Question No. 202.

Fiscal Data

205. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, using the most up-to-date economic and fiscal information available, an estimate of Ireland's contribution to the EU budget in respect of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13344/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The most recent published figures on the EU Budget relate to the financial year 2015 and are available in the Budget Statistics bulletin on the Department of Finance's website. According to the bulletin in 2015 Ireland contributed c. €1,952 million to the EU budget while receiving €1,770m in public sector receipts (€1,919m when including direct management receipts).

In 2016, Ireland contributed c. €2,023 million to the EU budget. In relation to receipts for 2016, we will only have a final outturn in the middle of 2017 when all the relevant data is published.

Tax Avoidance

206. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the flat rate addition which has been in use the poultry industry, whereby the cost of inputs are artificially inflated for the purpose of inflating flat rate addition and the normal VAT system in order to generate an excessive level of VAT recovery, might also be occurring in other sectors of the agricultural industry, such as the rearing of beef on a contractual basis for beef processors; if his attention has been drawn to such allegations; if an investigation or enquiry was carried out to determine if such was occurring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13382/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the Revenue Commissioners brought to the attention of my Department that the interaction of the flat rate scheme for farmers and the normal VAT system was being exploited in a particular agricultural sector to achieve overcompensation for flat rate farmers on their VAT input costs. To address the issue I introduced a legislative measure in Finance Act 2016, which enables me to exclude by Ministerial Order any specified agricultural sector where the business structures or models employed result in a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs borne by flat-rate farmers within that sector. If it proves necessary to do so, I fully intend to make any order required to exclude any sector from the flat rate scheme. I expect Revenue to advise me later in the year if such action is necessary in any sectors.

I am currently aware of claims concerning overcompensation of farmers for VAT input costs in one particular agricultural sector but am not aware of other such instances. I would encourage the Deputy to provide any information he has concerning such activities to Revenue.

Stability Programme Data

207. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to publish a stability

programme update in April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13387/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In accordance with the requirements of Regulation 1466/97, Ireland's 2017 Stability Programme Update must be submitted to the European Commission no later than the end of April. It is normally published at the same time.

The Stability Programme Update (SPU) must, of course, be approved by the Government before it is submitted to the Commission. It has been the practice in recent years to publish the draft SPU following Government approval but before submission to the European Commission, and I propose to follow that approach again this year.

Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

208. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Finance the number of taxpayers that have been prosecuted by reason of delivering to the Revenue Commissioners an incorrect income tax return when the taxpayer has a zero liability for income tax arising from this return since the enactment of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded summarily in the District Court; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded upon indictment in the Circuit Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13397/17]

209. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies or officers of companies that have been prosecuted by reason of the company making an incorrect return in connection with corporation tax and in which this return attempted to correct an omission from a previous return of that company in connection with corporation tax since the enactment of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded summarily in the District Court; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded upon indictment in the Circuit Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13398/17]

210. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies or officers of companies that have been prosecuted for delivering to the Revenue Commissioners incorrect accounts in connection with corporation tax whereby a period of six years has expired from the date of the delivery of these accounts to the date of the commencement of this prosecution since the enactment of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded summarily in the District Court; the number of these prosecutions that have proceeded upon indictment in the Circuit Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13399/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 to 210, inclusive, together.

It is an offence, under section 1078(2)(a) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, to knowingly or wilfully deliver an incorrect return, statement or accounts or knowingly or wilfully furnish any incorrect information in connection with any return.

I am advised by Revenue that their records relating to prosecutions are not maintained in a format that would support the provision of information of the extent requested by the Deputy. It is not possible, therefore, given the amount of research that would be required to compile it, to provide the information sought.

I would draw to the Deputy s attention that, in my reply to Question No. 98 of 22 February 2017, I indicated that I had been advised by Revenue that, between the years 2007 and 2016,

no prosecutions were instituted for the delivery of an incorrect income tax return where no liability to income tax arose from that return. In replying to Questions Nos. 117 and 118 on 23 February, I said that there were no prosecutions in respect of the delivery of incorrect accounts in connection with corporation tax during those years.

Tax Reliefs Data

211. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown by county of the 297,800 mortgage accounts estimated to be in receipt of tax relief at source in respect of mortgage interest in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13412/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) is paid by way of tax relief at source (TRS) and is administered through the relevant lending institutions. I am advised by Revenue that the MIR database is not maintained in a manner that would facilitate the production of a county level breakdown. While address details are maintained in the TRS database, there is not a separate field for the county and it would require a significant upgrade of the system to enable it to capture the type of detail requested by the Deputy. Therefore it is not possible at this time to provide the Deputy with the information requested.

Pensions Data

212. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an owner of a minimum approved retirement fund who cannot withdraw it until 75 years of age is not allowed to freeze the account to prevent any further interest charges being applied (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13415/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that an individual in a defined contribution pension savings arrangement has the option of putting the funds accumulated under the arrangement into an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF) on retirement, subject to conditions.

Where such an individual is under the age of 75 at the time of exercising the option and does not meet the requirement of having a minimum guaranteed pension income for life of €12,700 per annum, he or she is required to set aside an amount of €63,500 (or the remainder of the pension fund if less than €63,500 after taking a retirement lump sum) by investing the amount in an Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF) or by the purchase of an annuity. The purpose of the AMRF is to ensure that an individual, who does not have a minimum guaranteed pension income for life, has a capital nest-egg to provide for the later years of his or her retirement.

On foot of changes to the AMRF arrangements which I introduced in Finance Act 2014, with effect from 1 January 2015, AMRF owners can draw down up to 4% of the value of the fund assets on one occasion annually until he or she either meets the guaranteed pension income requirement or attains the age of 75, at which point, the AMRF automatically becomes an ARF and any remaining funds can be drawn down at the owner's discretion.

As the funds in an AMRF are beneficially owned by the AMRF owner, the question of how they are managed, in order, for example, to maximise returns, or to protect against adverse investment conditions is a matter for the owner, in conjunction with his or her Qualifying Fund Manager.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Administration

213. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm that in circumstances where the Revenue Commissioners deemed and directed an expenditure, in this case Non-Principal Private Residence charge, as not being an allowable expense and such expense is subsequently deemed to be allowable, that the statutory limit in such a case runs from the date of the confirmation that the expense is deemed an allowable expense and not the chargeable period to which the claim relates, in view of the fact that to have claimed within that period would have been futile as it would have been disallowed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13442/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue 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 responses to PQ numbers 130 and 156 of 14 February 2017 and PQ number 170 of 7 March 2017, Section 865 (4) of the TCA provides that that right is subject to the making of a claim within a statutory limit of four years after 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 4 year rule for claiming repayments.

Section 865 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 the decision of the High Court regarding the deductibility against rental profits of the NPPR charge has been appealed by Revenue to the Court of Appeal. Until that appeal is decided Revenue is not in a position to amend assessments or process repayment claims based on the High Court judgement. Any repayment claims made in relation to this matter 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 advise 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.

Bank Guarantee Scheme Data

214. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 7 March 2017, the details of every occasion his Department acted as guarantor in which facility deeds were entered into with the Central Bank; the names of the banks in question; the amounts of the facility deeds; the dates on which they were entered into and their duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13465/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table:

Bank	Commencement date	Amount at commencement	Maximum amount of guarantee	Expiry date	Amount at expiration
Anglo/IBRC	Sept 2010	€10bn	€37bn (Feb 2011)	Feb 2013	€16bn
AIB	Nov 2010	€5bn	€15bn (Dec 2010 to Apr 2011)	Jan 2013	€1m
BOI	Dec 2010	€10bn	€14bn (Jul 2011)	Jun 2012	€5bn
IL&P	Mar 2011	€5bn	€8bn (Aug 2011 to Dec 2011)	Jun 2013	€1m

Tax Code

215. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the review of the operation of the betting tax regime as part of the 2017 tax strategy group process, in particular the areas that affect on-course bookmakers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13480/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, during the Finance Bill Committee Stage Debates in both the Dáil and the Seanad, my colleague, Minister of State Eoghan Murphy TD, gave a commitment that betting duty would be examined as part of the Tax Strategy Group process in 2017. I can inform you that officials in my Department are in the early stages of examining the area with a view to completing a review for inclusion in the Excise TSG Paper 2017.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) is in place since the early 1990's and is chaired by the Department of Finance with membership comprising senior officials and political advisers from a number of Civil Service Departments and Offices. Papers on various options for tax policy changes are prepared annually for the Group by Department of Finance officials.

In line with the Government's commitment to Budgetary reform including greater engagement with the Oireachtas, the Tax Strategy Group papers relating to Budget 2017 were published in July 2016. This was well in advance of Budget Day and helped to facilitate informed discussion. Decisions in relation to the TSG for Budget 2018 have yet to be finalised but I am satisfied that the approach adopted last year worked well and I do not expect to change it significantly.

It is important to note that the Tax Strategy Group is not a decision-making body and the papers produced are a list of options and issues. They are only one part of an overall Budget-

ary and Finance Bill process which now includes the National Economic Dialogue, the Budget Oversight Committee and the provision of pre-Budget submissions and engagement with specific groups and individuals.

Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 202.

Insurance Costs

217. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the serious concerns of the hospitality sector in relation to the increasing costs of insurance; the measures he proposes to implement to reduce such insurance premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13514/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Concerns relating to increasing costs of insurance in the hospitality sector have been brought to my attention. However, neither I, nor the Central Bank can directly influence insurance pricing as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. It should be noted that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation.

However, it is possible for the State to play a role in helping to stabilise the market and deal with factors contributing to the cost of insurance. Accordingly, I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. This Working Group is examining the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identifying what short, medium and long-term measures can be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance premiums and the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017.

The Working Group is now in its second phase which is concentrating on the Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance sectors. The terms of reference for this work have been agreed and it is proposed that the following core areas will be considered:

- Overview of the Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance sectors

- Impact of the cost of insurance on the competitiveness of particular business sectors

- Impact of health and safety issues on the cost of insurance

- Other market issues

In addition, the Working Group will build upon previous work done as it relates to Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance claims in examining:

- Personal Injury data and information

- Effects of legal costs and litigation processes on insurance costs

- Current claims compensation arrangements and cost of claims

- Impact of unlawful activity on insurance sector

The Working Group is continuing to meet on a regular basis to examine issues related to Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance, including those pertinent to the hospitality sector. Indeed, as part of the current consultation process, there has already been a very informative engagement with relevant organisations within the hospitality sector such as the Licensed Vintners Association and the Vintners' Federation of Ireland. I am informed that the Working Group will also hear from the Irish Hotels Federation.

It is envisaged that the final results of the second phase will take the form of an addendum to the existing Report. As with the first phase, the aim is for all relevant bodies and stakeholders to work together in order to deliver fairer premiums for businesses without unnecessary delay.

Pensions Data

218. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a copy of the rule book of every Revenue Commissioner staff pension scheme commenced in the 1970s and 1980s which would affect staff currently retiring. [13529/17]

223. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a copy of all forms the Revenue Commissioners used in the 1970s and 1980s providing for opt in and opt out in respect of spouse and child pension provision for staff members. [13554/17]

224. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the proportion of staff members in the Revenue Commissioners that have opted out of spouse and child pension provision. [13555/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218, 223 and 224 together.

I am advised by Revenue that they have contacted the Deputy's office directly to provide the requested documentation in relation to questions 13529/17 and 13554/17.

The following documents were provided in response to question 13529/17:

FAQ 1 Established Civil Servants including Prison Officers Who Pay Modified Class B PRSI

FAQ 2 Established Civil Servants Including Prison Officers who Pay Class A PRSI

FAQ 3 Non-contributory Pension Scheme for Non-established State Employees

A Brief Guide to the Occupational Superannuation Scheme for Established Civil Servants

The following documents were provided in response to question 13554/17:

Forms for 1979 Non-established State Employees Contributory Widow's and Children's Pension Scheme

1981 Spouses' and Children's Pension Scheme

Revised 1984 Spouses' and Children's Pension Scheme

1986 Non-established State Employees Spouses' and Children's Pension Scheme

In reply to question 13555/17 I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that

based on a query run against the latest payroll, 17.72% of staff members in the Revenue Commissioners have opted out of the spouse and child pension provision.

Vehicle Registration

219. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance the total vehicle registration tax to be paid on a camper van (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13541/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Vehicle registration tax (VRT) is charged on a motor caravan (camper van) at the rate of 13.3% of its open market selling price (OMSP). The OMSP of a used motor caravan is the price, inclusive of all taxes and duties, which, in Revenue's opinion, it might reasonably be expected to fetch on first arm's length retail sale in the State.

The OMSP will be determined by Revenue at the time the motor caravan is presented for registration. I am advised by Revenue that there is insufficient information available to provide an estimate of the VRT for the vehicle in question.

NAMA Operations

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details, including the aggregate value of such transactions if individual transaction values cannot be provided, of the list of NAMA loan or asset disposals, including disposals by a receiver appointed by NAMA, since the inception of the agency where an open competitive sales process did not take place and where the disposal was made to a special purchaser, in tabular form; when NAMA's policy changed in respect of such off-market disposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13542/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, NAMA does not own property, and its role in relation to property is as a secured lender. As a result, where properties and assets over which NAMA holds a charge are being sold, the sales process is managed by the property owner or by a receiver. NAMA does not manage the sales process, but NAMA guidelines require that a property is openly marketed, with the property owner or receiver appointing a sales agent to market the property and ensure that the sale is conducted in an open and transparent manner. As secured lender, NAMA's approval of the sale is required before its security can be released to complete the sale.

NAMA's Business Plan, which was published in July 2010, stated that NAMA would engage proactively with Government departments, local authorities, State agencies and other appropriate bodies in relation to their possible need for land/properties. The NAMA Board formally approved a policy in relation to open marketing exceptions in 2014 and since then all exceptions have been logged. I am advised that since January 2014, 240 exceptions to NAMA's open marketing policy have been approved and the aggregate value of these transactions to date is €1.2 billion, which is less than 6% of total disposal proceeds since January 2014. Such derogations are dependent on achieving the current market value as determined by independent market valuations.

I am further advised that NAMA Board policy in relation to exceptions provides for four exceptions to its policy of open marketing:

1. Where specific written advice (either legal or professional) has been obtained by NAMA in relation to the disposal of the asset recommending that open marketing should not be pursued for commercial or legal reasons. Such assets are offered at the appraised market value confirmed by way of independent valuation report received by NAMA.

2. Where a government or State entity has approached NAMA to purchase an asset for legitimate reasons in the public interest. Such derogations are dependent on achieving the current market value as determined by an independent valuation.

3. Where NAMA, through NARPS, acquires assets for social housing purposes from NAMA debtors or receivers for onward leasing to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). Such derogations are dependent on achieving the current market value as determined by an independent valuation

4. Where the asset is the subject of a compulsory purchase order (CPO) by a State body or local authority.

Included in the **first exceptions category** are transactions which resulted in full redemption of par debt, transactions involving defective security and transactions involving the sale of assets where there were legal impediments to open market sales. These included cases involving existing ownership agreements and third parties with legal entitlements or pre-emption rights relating to the assets. Table 1 provides a breakdown by sub-category. NAMA's primary objective under the NAMA Act is to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State and in cases where it can be demonstrated that the best achievable price for an asset will not be achieved on the open market, derogation from NAMA's open marketing policy is sought from the appropriate delegated authority. Such assets are offered at the appraised market value confirmed by way of independent valuation report received by NAMA. The total value of transactions in this category was €795m.

The **second exceptions category** relates to cases where State bodies require certain property assets in the public interest. This includes the sale of sites to the Department of Education for the provision of primary and secondary schools and properties and sites sold to local authorities and to various Government departments and State agencies. This category also includes sites identified by IDA Ireland as suitable for Foreign Direct Investment. Derogations are applied in instances where the purchaser is an existing tenant or where an existing business is looking to expand into an adjoining NAMA-secured property or site. Again, such derogations are dependent on achieving the current market value as determined by an independent valuation. The total value of transactions in this second category was €242m.

The **third exceptions category** relates to NAMA's engagement with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government and the Housing Agency in relation to the supply of residential properties for social housing purposes. Since the start of 2012, NAMA has identified 6,941 houses and apartments controlled by its debtors and receivers as available for social housing. Of these, 2,748 properties have been confirmed as suitable by local authorities. NAMA, through its special purpose vehicle, NARPS, purchased properties from its debtors and receivers for onward long-term leasing to local authorities or AHBs. In addition, AHBs directly purchased residential properties for social housing purposes. In total, social housing transactions valued at €149m have received derogation from NAMA's policy of open marketing. Again, such derogations are dependent on achieving the current market value as determined by independent market valuations.

The fourth exceptions category sites subject to a CPO by a local authority or other State body accounted for €9m in transactions.

TABLE 1 below summarises the position since January 2014.

Exceptions category	Number of exception approvals	Value of transactions€m
1. Open marketing not pursued for legal reasons or because a better return was achieved through an alternative disposal mechanism:		
a. Legal restrictions or asset defects	45	429
b. PAR debt repayment/ settlement agreements	20	228
c. Value enhancement through merging of sites with contiguous sites owned by third parties	20	117
d. Special purchasers	41	21
2. State bodies acquiring property assets in the public interest	44	242
3.Residential properties for social housing purposes	65	149
4.Sites subject to a CPO	5	9
TOTAL	240	1,195

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 104 of 9 March 2017, if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13545/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the fact that a particular entity is a charity does not alter their legal obligation to maintain taxpayer confidentiality in accordance with Section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

The Deputy may wish to note that the Revenue Commissioners publish a list of charities that have charitable tax exempt status, which is available at the following link, http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/registrations-assessments-transactions-charitable-exemption.html, as well as a list of the bodies that qualify for the donations scheme, which is available at the following link: http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/registrations-assessments-transactions-resident-charities.html.

Question No. 222 answered with Question No. 179.

Questions Nos. 223 and 224 answered with Question No. 218.

VAT Exemptions

225. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been

drawn to the fact that the measure introduced in the last budget to charge VAT on training and development activities is having the effect of actively discouraging businesses from offering training and development opportunities to their staff; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the measure has led to training courses being cancelled to the detriment of the business providing training and also the staff that would have benefitted from the training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13559/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by Revenue that the legislative provision which exempts education and vocational training from VAT was amended by the Finance Act 2015. The amendment ensures that national VAT legislation reflects recent judgements of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

The amendment provides that VAT exemption applies to providers of children's or young people's education and school or university education where it is provided by a recognised body. Exemption also continues to apply to training and development courses where the training and retraining is of a vocational nature. This means that exemption applies to training or retraining courses which prepare trainees for future employment and to training relating directly to a trade or profession given to a person in order to improve their ability to carry out their work. Where a course is offered by a business to their staff and it relates to their work, the training and development course continues to be exempt from VAT.

Revenue has consulted closely with stakeholders in the training and development sector and has prepared detailed guidance for providers. The draft guidance has been circulated to industry representatives for their views and will be published in the coming weeks. If an education or training provider has any doubt as to the taxable status of a particular activity, they should contact their local Revenue District for advice.

Tax Credits

226. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an application for incapacitated child tax credit for a family (details supplied) was unsuccessful; if a new application can be submitted in this instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13562/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislation governing entitlement to the Incapacitated Child Tax Credit is contained in Section 465 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, as amended. The legislation provides that a person is entitled to the tax credit, for a year, if he or she proves that, at any time during that year, he or she had a child under 18 years of age who is permanently incapacitated by reason of mental or physical infirmity.

A child under 18 is regarded as permanently incapacitated by reason of mental or physical infirmity only if that infirmity is such that, if the child were over 18, there would be a reasonable expectation that he/she would be incapacitated from maintaining himself/herself.

In the context of establishing entitlement to the credit, Revenue requires medical evidence to confirm both the extent of the incapacity and whether the incapacity permanently prevents the child from being able, in the long term, to maintain him or herself independently when over the age of 18 years. If the incapacity can be corrected or relieved by the use of any treatment, device, medication or therapy, the child would not be regarded as permanently incapacitated for the purposes of this relief.

In the case concerned, Revenue has informed me that supplementary medical evidence was sought to confirm entitlement to the credit. Based on the information provided, the tax credit

would not be payable in respect of one of the children, and in the case of the second child, there was an issue regarding the medical opinion provided and in relation to long term incapacity. I am further informed by Revenue that the taxpayers concerned were advised by letter of 10 February 2017 of the information required from the doctor to support the granting of the tax credit. If the additional information is supplied, the application can be considered further by Revenue.

Pension Levy

227. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide relief for holders of private pensions that were subjected to the Government levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13634/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I take it the Deputy is referring to the stamp duty levies applying to the assets of funded pension arrangements introduced in 2011 to pay for the Jobs Initiative, the chargeable persons for which are the trustees of pension schemes and others responsible for the management of pension fund assets.

The original 0.6% stamp duty levy on pension fund assets ended in 2014. The additional levy of 0.15% which I introduced for 2014 and 2015, mainly to help continue to fund Jobs Initiative, also ended in 2015.

The position is that the equivalent value of all of the money raised from the stamp duty levy has been used to fund the wide range of measures introduced in the Jobs Initiative to protect existing jobs and to help create new jobs and the Initiative has been a success in this regard. The measures introduced include expenditure measures such as the Jobbridge and Springboard schemes, as well as a number of tax and PRSI incentives such as the reduction in the VAT rate from 13.5% to 9% for the tourism and hospitality sectors and the temporary halving of the lower employer PRSI rate.

While the pension fund levies have ceased as I have already outlined, I have no plans to repay the pension fund levies collected or introduce reliefs as suggested in the question. The value of the funds raised by way of the levy have been used to protect and create jobs and this has helped to create the improving financial and economic position of the State. Taxpayers to whom the impact of the levy may have been passed on by the chargeable persons responsible for the payment of the levy (the pension scheme trustees, etc.) will benefit from the changes which I began in Budget 2015 and which have continued in subsequent Budgets to reduce the tax burden on low and middle income earners.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

228. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the case of persons (details supplied); if they are eligible under the help-to-buy scheme; if not, the reasons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13678/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislative provisions for the Help to Buy incentive are set out in section 477C Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA), as inserted by section 9 of the Finance Act 2016. The incentive applies for the period from 19 July 2016 to 31 December 2019.

The details supplied by the Deputy concern a couple who are self-building their home and who drew down the first tranche of the relevant mortgage in March 2016, before the announce-

ment of the Help to Buy incentive. In this instance the relevant definitions contained in the legislation are 'qualifying period' and 'qualifying residence'.

A 'qualifying period' means the period commencing on 19 July 2016 and ending on 31 December 2019.

A 'qualifying residence' is:-

- a new building which was not, at any time, used, or suitable for use, as a dwelling or a building converted for use as a dwelling,

- which is occupied as the sole or main residence of a first-time purchaser (or self-builder),

- where the purchase value is not greater than €600,000 in the period from 19 July to 31 December 2016, and €500,000 in the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019, and

- in the period specified, a contract is entered into between a claimant and [...] a qualifying contractor or, the first tranche of a qualifying loan [...] is drawn down by a claimant.

The details supplied by the Deputy suggest that while the couple appear to meet some of the eligibility criteria for the Help to Buy refund, they do not meet the critical element regarding the date, as the first tranche of their mortgage was drawn down before the qualifying period commenced. Thus there is no entitlement to a refund in the circumstances described.

One of the primary policy aims of the incentive is to assist those struggling to save for the deposit required in purchasing a home. Individuals who purchased 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 drawdown of agreed mortgages in respect of self build properties before 19th of July, could also not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to be available to them.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review and address concerns (details supplied) in relation to the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13767/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy may be aware, there are three elements to the payment provisions under the Help to Buy incentive.

- Firstly, in respect of a first home purchased or self-built in the period from 19 July to 31 December 2016, the refund is paid directly to the purchaser or self-builder, that is 'to the claimant's bank account'.

- Secondly, for a first home purchased from a qualifying contractor in the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019, the refund is paid to the qualifying contractor's bank account.

- Thirdly, for a self-built home where the first tranche of the mortgage is drawn down in the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019, the refund is paid to the 'claimant's qualifying loan bank account', which is taken to be an account with the financial institution that extended the mortgage.

In relation to the concerns provided by the Deputy around the beneficiaries of the Help to Buy incentive, its purpose is to assist first-time buyers to fund their first home, whether purchased from a builder or self-built. The first-time buyer or self-builder in any of the three circumstances described above gets the benefit of the scheme, as their refund under the Help to Buy incentive is a credit against the purchase price/build cost of the home. In the case of a first-time buyer who purchases a home after 1 January 2017, she or he is getting the benefit of the refund even though he or she does not receive the Help to Buy refund directly. The legislation, in Section 477C(16)(b), of the TCA is very clear that 'where the appropriate payment is made in respect of a claimant to a qualifying contractor [...] the contractor shall treat the appropriate payment as a credit against the purchase price of the qualifying residence.'

Furthermore, regarding the comments referred to by the Deputy concerning the deposit process, the Help to Buy incentive aims to assist a first-time purchaser with funding a deposit at the outset of the purchase or self build 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 full deposit. I am advised by Revenue that from their discussions with the Construction Industry Federation, their understanding of the usual purchase process involves the payment of a 2 per cent booking deposit, followed by the payment of the balance to bring the deposit up to 10 per cent of the purchase price upon the signing of the contract. The timing of the payment of this deposit is a matter between the purchaser and seller but it is only when a contract has been entered into that a claim can be made for the tax refund under the scheme.

For a self-build property, the first major expenditure point 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. The Help to Buy refund is worth 5 per cent of the value of the property, up to certain limits, and the legislation provides that it is a credit against the purchase of the new home.

VAT Exemptions

230. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Finance if a newly developed graveyard becomes exempt from 13.5% VAT once it is five years old; the person or body that pays the 13.5% VAT on the grave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13793/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Schedule 1 of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 lists the activities that are exempt from VAT which includes the provision of services by a funeral undertaker but does not extend to the supply of graves. The supply of a grave in a graveyard that is more than 5 years old is also exempt from VAT, but the supply of a grave in a newly developed graveyard is liable to the reduced rate of VAT (13.5%). However, the operator of a newly developed graveyard is entitled to VAT deductibility on their development costs as well as ongoing maintenance costs during the period where VAT is applied to the supply of graves.

Revenue Commissioners

231. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if extra public car parking spaces will be provided at public offices, Hebron Road, Kilkenny; if appropriate plans for car parking will be put in place to accommodate the public and the employees that use the location for services and work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13840/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue, as the lead tenant in the Government Offices in Hebron Road, Kilkenny, that car parking arrangements are subject to regular review. All available space on the grounds of the offices that is suitable for car parking use has been developed for this purpose. There are no current plans to expand the number of car parking spaces.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Administration

232. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if the tax benefit of the home renovation incentive scheme can be carried forward for more than two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13901/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Home Renovation Incentive, introduced on 25th October 2013, provides income tax relief in respect of certain repairs, renovations and improvements carried out on a person's main residence by a tax compliant contractor qualifying under the Incentive. The scheme was subsequently extended to include repairs, renovations and improvements carried out on rental properties in Finance Act 2014, and improvements carried out by tenants of local authority homes in Finance Act 2016.

To qualify for relief, all qualifying work has to be carried out before 31 December 2018. However, where planning permission is required and is in place by 31 December 2018, works carried out and paid for up to 31 March 2019 will qualify.

The relief is given, as follows:

- in the first tax year after the tax year in which the payment is made to the qualifying contractor, by the lower of-

- 50 per cent of the relief due, and

- the amount which reduces the income tax of that tax year to nil,

and

- in the second tax year after the tax year in which the payment is made to the qualifying contractor, by the lower of-

- that part of the relief due that was not used in the first tax year, and

- the amount which reduces the income tax of that tax year to nil.

If relief due cannot be used in the first two tax years after the tax year in which the payment is made due to the insufficiency of income tax charged on the individual in the those two tax years, this unused relief, called "excess relief", can be used to reduce the income tax liability in subsequent tax years until the relief is fully utilised. However, the amount of the excess relief used in any tax year cannot be greater than the amount which reduces the income tax charged on the individual in that tax year to nil.

Credit Unions

233. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether Government policy is constraining the future potential of the credit union movement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14020/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to make it very clear that this Government's policy is not constraining the future potential of the credit union movement. In fact I would argue the opposite. As I have stated many times, credit unions have a key role to play in providing access to credit and other important services in local communities throughout the country. The Government recognises this and has put in place a number of measures to ensure that credit unions can continue to provide services to their members and to ensure the stability of the sector into the future. These measures include:

- the establishment of the Commission on Credit Unions;

- the publication of the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012;

- the establishment of the Credit Union Restructuring Board ReBo;

- the establishment of a stabilisation levy to support credit unions that are undercapitalised but are otherwise viable;

- the availability of €250 million of exchequer funding for voluntary restructuring of credit unions facilitated by ReBo;

- the availability of €250 million of exchequer funding for resolution purposes.

Most of these measures stemmed from recommendations made in 2012 by the Commission on Credit Unions in its final report and were implemented over five years with the objective of developing a strengthened and revitalised credit union sector to ensure it is in a position to play an increasing role in the financial landscape of the future in this country.

Following on from this, in December 2015, I invited the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) to carry out a review of the implementation of those recommendations set out in the report of the Commission on Credit Unions. On 29 June 2016 I was presented with a report by CUAC which provides an in-depth analysis of the sector from a financial perspective and from a stakeholder perspective based on discussions with a wide range of stakeholders. This approach ensured a balanced report from CUAC providing focused and effective recommendations. I have now put in place an Implementation Group, which includes members from the main credit union representative bodies, to oversee and monitor implementation of these recommendations, which will support credit unions in many ways including in developing their business model.

The Government wants not only strong, vibrant credit unions offering a safe and secure place for members' savings but also credit unions' being appropriately positioned to offer their members a wide range of services including loans, debit card facilities and new facilities based on the needs of their membership. This Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement in Ireland and the Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall and it is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement.

Credit Unions

234. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new credit union branches that have been approved for opening in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14021/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In accordance with Section 6 of the Credit Union Act 1997 (1997 Act), the Central Bank of Ireland is the sole authority with the

power and responsibility for registering credit unions in Ireland. The last registration of a credit union took place in 1999.

The Central Bank informs me that it has not received an application to register a credit union since the Central Bank assumed responsibility for registering, regulating and supervising credit unions in 2003.

Registered credit unions may operate sub-office(s) (i.e. branches) under their registration and so do not require a separate registration for these.

Credit Unions

235. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the process for new credit union branches to be approved and licensed by the Central Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14022/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland (Central Bank) is the sole authority with the power and responsibility for registering credit unions in Ireland in accordance with the provisions of the Credit Union Act 1997 (1997 Act). Under the 1997 Act, credit unions are registered rather than licensed. The Central Bank has an application process, along with supporting documentation, for any potential applicant wishing to register a credit union. The 'Checklist for completing and submitting Credit Union Registration Applications' which is available on request from the Central Bank, must be completed by applicants during the application process. It seeks information on all criteria credit unions are required to comply with on an on-going basis including:

Criteria Credit Unions are required to comply with:	Criteria Credit Unions are required to comply with:
- common bond and membership	- internal audit
- proposed rules of the credit union	- financial control
- objectives in line with the credit union objectives set out in the 1997 Act	- anti-money laundering
- strategic plan including proposed activities (products and services) to be provided to members and proposed funding strategy	- conflicts of interest
- governance arrangements and oversight	- reserves and liquidity
- risk management	- lending and investments
- compliance	- systems and control/policies and procedures

The comprehensive application process also requires details of the initial reserves the credit union will hold and it must be demonstrated that those initial reserves will be adequate to support the credit union. In addition, the applicant is required to provide five year projected financial statements, as well as reserves and liquidity projections.

In relation to the board of directors and management, information is also sought on the following requirements:

- all persons proposed to perform Controlled Functions, which include the board of directors and management, must meet the Central Bank's Fitness and Probity requirements for credit unions. This includes obtaining approval by the Central Bank of the chair of the board of directors and the manager of the credit union prior to the individuals concerned taking up these

positions.

- the governance framework in the 1997 Act which sets out requirements for the board of directors and certain management positions.

Conditions may be imposed by the Central Bank on a credit union s registration.

Any applicant interested in registering a credit union can contact the Registry of Credit Unions at the Central Bank.

Appointments to State Boards

236. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications received by his Department for the recent positions available on the Central Bank Commission; the number of these applications placed before him for his consideration; the completion date for all vacancies to be filled on this commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14050/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In 2016 the Public Appointments Service (PAS) undertook a campaign to identify suitably qualified candidates to fill the two vacancies on the Central Bank Commission.

The campaign attracted thirty applications, six of which were shortlisted by a PAS led assessment panel for further consideration by the Minister.

While these six candidates exhibited proven track records in their respective fields, it was decided that, in the context of the Brexit led focus on international businesses seeking to establish operations here, to try and add further suitable candidates to the original six identified by the Public Appointments Service.

That process is still ongoing.

Departmental Staff Data

237. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 23 February 2017, if he will provide details with regard to the two members of staff currently suspended in the Revenue Commissioners, in tabular form (details supplied). [14056/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the position is as follows:

Grade	Job	Date of commencement of suspension	Date of commencement of investigation	Date investigation completed *	Cost of investigation	Salary costs for each month of suspension	Replacement salary costs for each suspension
Higher Executive Officer	Compliance	21 April 2015	6 May 2015	10 March 2016	No external costs	€5,008	Officer not replaced

Grade	Job	Date of commencement of suspension	Date of commencement of investigation	Date investigation completed *	Cost of investigation	Salary costs for each month of suspension	Replacement salary costs for each suspension
Clerical Officer	Customer Service	13 October 2015	13 October 2015	7 December 2015	No external costs	€2,956	Officer not replaced

*In both cases the Disciplinary Code process is ongoing

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme

238. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the home renovation incentive scheme which ceased at the end of December 2016; and if any other such scheme similar to this scheme is in place. [14082/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In my Budget 2017 speech I announced the extension of the Home Renovation Incentive until 31 December 2018. This was subsequently legislated for as part of the Finance Act 2016.

Departmental Legal Costs

239. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14132/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the table. Much of this information has already been published on my Department's website.

Legal Advice	Firm involved	Barristers that provided the service	Amount 2017 (to date)
District Court Deposition	Hayes Solicitors	Legal firm engaged only	€1,448.94
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, related litigation and further emerging issues (part recoupable)	Arthur Cox	Legal firm engaged only	€45,674.63

Legal Advice	Firm involved	Barristers that provided the service	Amount 2017 (to date)
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, further emerging issues and in relation to the State's investment in AIB (recoupable)	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€160,678.63
State Aid	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€27,674.39
eDiscovery Services	McCann Fitzgerald	Legal firm engaged only	€40,966.37
			€276,442.96
			Amount 2016
State Aid	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€143,946.00
State Aid	See across	Conor Quigley (Queen's Counsel)	€58,538.00
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, related litigation and further emerging issues (part recoupable)	Arthur Cox	Legal firm engaged only	€46,359.27
State Aid	See across	Philip Baker (Queen's Counsel)	€33,554.00
State Aid	See across	Aoife Goodman (Junior Counsel)	€29,761.00
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, further emerging issues and in relation to the State's investment in AIB (recoupable)	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€15,119.79
State Aid	See across	Philip Baker (Queen's Counsel)	€30,884.00
State Aid	See across	Maurice G Collins (Senior Counsel)	€45,004.00
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, related litigation and further emerging issues (part recoupable)	Arthur Cox	Legal firm engaged only	€43,881.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Kate Hanley (Discovery Counsel)	€485.00

Legal Advice	Firm involved	Barristers that provided the service	Amount 2017 (to date)
Capital restructuring and other related matters in relation to the State's investment in AIB (recoupable)	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€29,715.00
District Court Deposition	Hayes Solicitors	Legal firm engaged only	€3,766.00
Restructuring of the Irish banking system, related litigation and further emerging issues (part recoupable)	Arthur Cox	Legal firm engaged only	€147,475.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Kate Hanley (Discovery Counsel)	€7,173.00
International Tax	See across	David Ewart (Queen's Counsel)	€34,878.00
State Aid	See across	Philip Baker (Queen's Counsel)	€2,048.00
E-discovery	GEON Legal Solutions	Legal firm engaged only	€16,102.00
Subject Access Request under Data Protection Act	Mason Hayes & Curran	Legal firm engaged only	€733.00
Minister's investment in the Banks and other commercial matters (part recoupable)	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€60,748.00
			€750,170.06
			Amount 2015

Legal Advice	Firm involved	Barristers that provided the service	Amount 2017 (to date)
Documentary counsel	See across	Alexander Caffrey (Discovery Counsel)	€24,364.00
EU Commission State Aid Investigation	See across	Aoife Goodman (Junior Counsel)	€55,052.00
Restructuring of Irish banking system, related litigation and further emerging issues (part recoupable)	Arthur Cox	Legal firm engaged only	€934,654.00

Legal Advice	Firm involved	Barristers that provided the service	Amount 2017 (to date)
Secondment - Professional Fees	Dillon Eustace	Legal firm engaged only	€36,900.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Emma Doyle (Discovery Counsel)	€20,139.00
E-discovery	GEON Legal Solutions	Legal firm engaged only	€120,036.00
Professional fees	Hayes Solicitors	Cian Ferriter (Senior Counsel) Anna Shanley (Junior Counsel)	€74,251.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Kate Hanley (Discovery Counsel)	€44,129.00
Access request	Mason, Hayes and Curran	Legal firm engaged only	€23,567.00
Legacy barrister fees re Irish Life sale.	Matheson	Legal firm engaged only	€6,150.00
To assist in the transposition of EU directives	Matheson	Legal firm engaged only	€27,183.00
EU Commission State Aid Investigation	See across	Maurice G Collins (Senior Counsel)	€89,184.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Nick Reilly (Discovery Counsel)	€18,304.00
State Aid	See across	Philip Baker (Queen's Counsel)	€151,691.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Sarah-Jane Hillery (Discovery Counsel)	€9,997.00
Documentary counsel	See across	Silvia Martinez (Discovery Counsel)	€21,842.00
Capital restructuring and other related matters in relation to the State's investment in AIB (recoupable)	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€346,744.00
IBRC Commission of Investigation.	William Fry	Legal firm engaged only	€223,725.00
			€2,227,912.00

Disadvantaged Status

240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) has not been included as a DEIS school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13547/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our

vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to *social_inclusion@education.gov.ie*

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Student Accommodation

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the disparity between rents being charged in private purpose built student accommodation (details supplied) and the average rent which DIT estimate students currently pay, which is €348 per

month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14148/17]

242. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated number of beds in purpose built student accommodation that are currently let to students in receipt of a partial or full student grant, students paying EU fees and students paying international fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14149/17]

388. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the disparity between rents being charged in private purpose built student accommodation (details supplied) and the full maintenance grant, which is less than one quarter of the annual rent charged for such purpose built student accommodation; his views on whether this will be a further impediment to access third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14150/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241, 242 and 388 together.

Firstly, I should point out that the student maintenance grant is a contribution towards the living costs of a student. It is not intended to cover the full costs of attending college. The student grant scheme does however, provide for different levels of maintenance support, depending on means. Grants are also provided at adjacent and non-adjacent rates. The higher non-adjacent rates are intended to provide additional support to those students who may be living away from home.

Secondly, and turning specifically to the area of Student Accommodation, the Deputy will be aware of the HEA report, Student Accommodation: Demand & Supply, published by my predecessor in 2015.

Subsequent to this, 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*

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.

Pillar 4 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan committed to development of a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector and this was delivered, with the publication of the Strategy for the Rental Sector. The Strategy introduced a Rent Predictability Measure to moderate rent increases in those parts of the country where the imbalance between demand and supply of rental accommodation is driving rent levels upwards most acutely. The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 gave effect to, and provided for the immediate implementation of, the Rent Predictability Measure. Areas of the country satisfying the statutory criteria will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones and rent increases in those areas are generally capped at 4% per annum for a period of 3 years. The measure was introduced with immediate effect in the four Dublin Local Authority areas and in Cork City. A further 12 Local Electoral Areas were designated as Rent Pressure Zones on 27 January 2017.

The most effective way to reduce and stabilise rents in the long-term is to increase supply and accelerate delivery of all types of housing. 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 imple-

menting 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.

Finally, the information requested by the Deputy, regarding the number of beds in purpose built student accommodation that are currently let to students in receipt of a partial or full student grant, students paying EU fees and students paying international fees, is not collected by my Department and would require a disproportionate amount of time and resources to compile.

Special Education Review

243. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when new arrangements for the NCSE model for special education needs in schools will be released to primary schools in view of the fact the deadline was February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12804/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools have been published.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles have been issued to all schools and details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

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 key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, 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's 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 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 schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. 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 schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile. This includes provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

The new allocations to schools will include provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

All allocations to schools include a supplementary provision, which has been referred to as the 'baseline allocation' which is allocated over and above the profiled allocation.

For students who start school from September 2017, with a specific diagnosis, either in junior infants or transferring from another school, the resources they need will already be in the school under the new model.

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 generally, a school's profile will 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. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: *www.ncse.ie*. Should a school wish to appeal they should do so by March 31st 2017.

Schools will be able to appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools should read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relates to the breakdown of the allocation, which

may be under consideration for appeal.

The model will allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. 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.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

Schools Building Projects Status

244. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the length of time a school building project (details supplied) has been at stage 2B, detailed design; the average time a new school construction project spends at stage 2B; the cause of the delay in this project build; when he envisages construction will be begin on this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12850/17]

245. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name of the architect on a school building project (details supplied); the amount being spent on the architectural process; if the spend on architectural services for this project will run over the initial budget; if so, the amount by which it will run over; the justification for any overspend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12851/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 and 245 together.

The major building project to which the Deputy refers was authorised to progress to Stage 2b (Detailed design) in December 2014. The project is now close to completing stage 2(b).

In general, it would be expected that a project would progress through stage 2(b) in about 7 to 12 months although some can take longer depending on the complexities of the particular project.

It is envisaged that the project will be progressed to tender stage in the coming months with a view to commencing on site before the end of 2017.

The architectural services on this project are being provided from my Departments internal architectural staffing resources. The other design team members are external consultants appointed following a public tender exercise.

The total amount paid to date on Design Team fees to date is €108,815 (excluding Vat). These payments do not include the cost of architectural services as these are being provided directly by the Department. There is no initial budget in respect of the architectural services

element for this project and therefore the question of a budget overrun for architectural services does not arise.

The Stage 2(b) (Detailed Design) documents are currently been finalised by the design team for submission to my Department. Once the submission is received and reviewed by my Department my officials will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project in line with the intended timeframe outlined above.

Teaching Council of Ireland

246. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) can use their current teaching position in France as an NQT probation for the purposes of qualifying as a primary school teacher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12855/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the Teaching Council is the independent body with statutory authority under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 for the procedures and criteria for the probation of teachers, including periods of probation which all teachers must successfully complete to achieve full registration. My Department does not get involved in individual cases. Accordingly, the person referred to by the Deputy should contact the Teaching Council directly in this matter.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) classes in primary and secondary schools respectively in County Donegal; the number of ASD places in these classes in each category of school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12860/17]

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.

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. In this regard the NCSE has advised that they are continuing to engage with schools in the area referred to by the Deputy in opening special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision.

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

With regard to County Donegal, there are currently 36 ASD special classes, of these, 21 are in primary schools and 15 are post-primary ASD classes, including 3 new post-primary classes which opened in September 2016.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in County Donegal, are available on *www.ncse.ie* in county order.

Teaching Council of Ireland

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 484 of 2 February 2016, if he has made a decision on the matter; if not, when he expects to make a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12871/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy is aware that the Teaching Council were asked to examine and advise on entry requirements to programmes of initial teacher education, including the Gaeltacht entry scheme to the Bachelor of Education.

The existing Gaeltacht entry scheme allows for the reservation of up to 10% of places in the colleges of education are reserved for Gaeltacht applicants. To qualify as a Gaeltacht applicant a person must be resident in an officially designated Gaeltacht area and it must be confirmed that the normal language of the home is Irish.

The 20 year strategy for the Irish Language proposes that up to 20% of places in colleges of education would be retained for students educated through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna, with students in English medium schools also being eligible, subject to a high performance threshold in Irish in the Leaving Certificate.

The Teaching Council has submitted its advice and it is currently being considered by my Department. The Action Plan for Education for 2017 contains a commitment to progress this recommendation.

National Educational Psychological Service

249. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an assess-

ment by a child psychologist of the National Educational Psychological Service will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied). [12874/17]

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

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

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

If the parents of the child, the subject of this question, have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise in the first instance that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to raising these concerns with the local NEPS service.

School Curriculum

250. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the leaving certificate applied programme is made available to students for the 2017-2018 academic year in County Leitrim; if he will address the fact that the leaving certificate applied programme is currently not offered to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact an educational psychologist has recommended that the person should be enrolled for the programme; the efforts he is making to ensure the school runs the programme for the 2017-2018 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12875/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their students.

The LCA is a two-year programme designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes.

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme, including the admittance of a student to the programme, in their school, and therefore not a matter for my Department to decide. I am aware that the number of schools offering

the programme has declined. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have recently commenced a review of Senior Cycle, and at my request the LCA forms part of this review.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

251. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the deficit in communication between Caranua and members of the deaf community regarding making available the terms of the scheme and guidelines for applications in Irish sign language; when a video (details supplied) will be posted on his Department's website; and if he will ensure Caranua also post this video. [12888/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware Caranua is an independent statutory body and I have no role in relation to its day to day operations. I have therefore asked my officials to forward your question to the Chief Executive of Caranua with the request that a direct response issue to you in the matter.

Special Educational Needs

252. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the current position of the special needs allocation in a school (details supplied) in order to ascertain the need for additional SNA's for this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12893/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating special educational needs supports to schools, including S support.

The NCSE allocates S support in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at *www.education.ie,* in order that students who have care needs can access S support as and when it is needed.

Responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports and resources to be allocated to schools to support individual pupils rests with the NCSE. In making allocations to schools, the NCSE takes into account the assessed individual needs of all children with identified needs in the school.

The NCSE has informed my Department that a full care needs review was carried out by the SENO in the school referred to by the Deputy on the 2nd March. The outcome of the review is that the school's allocation of S support has been increased by 0.5 post to provide for the care needs of the qualifying children in the school.

Where a school wishes to appeal the S allocation which has been made to them, they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at *www.ncse.ie.*

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on the NCSE website.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

253. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the review on Caranua; and the expected date of completion for the report. [12896/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The closing date for the receipt of submissions in regard to the draft Terms of Reference of the proposed review of eligibility for Caranua was 8 March last. A number of submissions have been received and these are being considered at present. Once that process has been completed the Terms of Reference will be finalised and the arrangements will then be put in place to carry out the review.

Schools Building Projects Status

254. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for works submitted by schools (details supplied). [12950/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that building projects for the schools in question are included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2019/21). A suitable site has been identified for both projects and the acquisition process is currently underway.

Schools Building Projects Status

255. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for works submitted by schools (details supplied). [12951/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that building projects for each of the schools referred to are included in my Department's 6 - Year Construction Programme (2016-2021).

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

Schools Building Projects Status

256. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for works submitted by a school (details supplied). [12952/17]

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

The school will be aware that preparatory work has been initiated to advance this project and my Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authorities concerned in the context of progressing the project through the architectural planning process.

Special Educational Needs Staff

257. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will allocate the appropriate staffing levels to a DEIS band 1 school (details supplied) which was recently

upgraded from DEIS band 2 school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12956/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is one of thirty such schools which were identified under the new assessment methodology as having a sufficient level of disadvantage to raise it from Urban Band 2 to Band 1 status under the DEIS Plan 2017.

The staffing schedule for the 2017/2018 school year for all primary schools, which includes details in relation to the allocations under DEIS, was recently published and can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0017_2017.pdf

Parental Leave

258. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a teachers parental leave can be transferred from siblings in a case in which there is a exceptional health requirement by one person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12982/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Parental leave is a period of unpaid leave available to teachers for the purpose of the care of children. It is provided for under the Parental Leave Acts 1998 and 2006 and the European Union (Parental Leave) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 81 of 2013).

The provisions of the scheme as it applies to teachers are outlined in Chapter 6 of Terms and Conditions of Employment for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools - Edition 1, the contents of which were agreed under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council (TCC).

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

A teacher is entitled to 18 weeks parental leave in respect of each child up to the age of 13 years or the age of 16 years in the case of a child with a disability and/or long-term illness. There is no obligation however to take the full 18 weeks leave.

Each parent has a separate entitlement to parental leave from his/her job and such leave is available to each parent who meets any of the following criteria:

(a) the natural parent

(b) the adoptive parent

(c) the adopting parent

(d) a teacher acting in *loco parentis* to a child

Subject to the approval of the employer, it is possible to transfer 14 weeks out of the 18 week parental leave entitlement to another parent of a relevant child, provided the other parent is employed with the same employer. In compliance with Council Directive 2010/18/EU, it is necessary for each parent to retain 4 weeks, out of his/her 18 week entitlement, for his/her own

personal use. Under that Directive, these 4 weeks may not be transferred to another parent and can only be used by the parent with whom the entitlement originates. This means where both parents are in the one school one parent may avail of 32 weeks and the other 4 weeks.

School Curriculum

259. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual breakdown between the number of female and male graduates in each of the years 2014 to 2016 in third level graduate courses in engineering, manufacturing, construction, science, technology and maths, in tabular form; the incentives and polices in place to fill the current shortage of qualified graduates here for vacancies arising in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12998/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government is committed to building upon our provision of STEM in primary, post-primary and third level education in order to ensure that we have the graduates to fulfil the existing and growing needs in STEM. Innovation 2020 - the Government's five-year strategy on research and development, science and technology, has the goal of making Ireland a Global Innovation Leader, and by so doing, ensuring a strong and sustainable economy.

The Department of Education and Skills Action Plan for Education for 2016-2019 and the National Skills Strategy, has a clear commitment to supporting and developing STEM.

The STEM report published in November last year by the STEM Education Review Group presents a detailed examination of the provision of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education in Ireland. It focussed on schools and on the necessary capacity building required to achieve a step-change in outcomes for learners that will benefit our society and the economy.

The recommendations proposed by the STEM Education Review Group are consistent with many existing and planned initiatives. They add considerable value to our thinking and will influence significantly the development (in the first half of 2017) of a STEM Education Policy Statement and implementation plan. This will further support teaching and learning in Science and Mathematics at all levels of the education system.

Within our school system, STEM education is growing, while new initiatives will continue to support greater participation and improved performance in STEM. My Department is committed to curricular reform in relation to STEM, for example

- Introduction of computer science subject at senior cycle in September 2019

- Introduction of new Science Syllabus for Junior Cycle in September 2016

- Development of a new primary mathematics curriculum which will support all children in the development of algorithmic and computational thinking to include coding

- New Science specification has been introduced for junior cycle students

- Junior Cycle Mathematics specification to be published in 2017 and implemented in 2018.

The information on graduates by gender in Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction, ICT and Natural Sciences, Mathematics & Statistics for the most recent three years available is as follows -

Field of Study	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	6,978	6,877	6,718
Female	1,061	1,097	1,180
Male	5,917	5,780	5,538
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	3,724	4,096	4,080
Female	746	829	845
Male	2,978	3,267	3,235
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	5,003	5,473	5,213
Female	2,587	2,779	2,652
Male	2,416	2,694	2,561

Springboard+ is a labour market activation measure which aims to reach people who have a previous history of employment but who have lost their job as a result of the recession. Its primary objective has been to help unemployed people to remain as close as possible to the labour market by accessing part-time flexible higher education and training opportunities to up-skill or re-skill in areas where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers. Since 2011 over 35,000 learners have participated on programmes in areas of key skill shortages. These include ICT, advanced manufacturing (including engineering, bio-pharma and med tech), financial services and construction.

In 2017 the programme is being expanded and manufacturing programmes will be open to people irrespective of their employment status; previously you needed to be unemployed to access these courses in Springboard+. The purpose of the change is to continue to address key skill shortages by providing focussed industry-related courses, even as the numbers on the Live Register continue to fall.

The ICT programmes provided under Springboard+, including a part-time ICT Conversion Programme, introduced in 2016 and open to people irrespective of their employment status, forms part of a suite of measures to increase the supply of ICT graduates as part of the implementation of the ICT Skills Action Plan 2014 - 2018. In addition to the targeted Springboard+ ICT courses, HEA funds additional places on mainstream Computer Science courses at Level 8. Institutions have been allocated €2,000 per additional place. In 2016 an additional 400 places were funded. The Information Technology Investment Fund (ITIF) continues to support HEI ICT programme retention, and provides annual block funding to HEIs, (€80,000 for Universities and €54,000 for IOTs). HEIs allocate this funding across their specific retention activities. Activities are focused on integration of incoming students, supports and facilities for all students, and targeted activities for students experiencing difficulties.

Reports covering activity in 2016, detail over 100 specific retention supports delivered to ICT students. These include learning support centres; additional tutorials over the summer and weekends; peer mentoring; staff retention seminars; group building initiatives; maths learning supports; and improved infrastructure. The Fund also supports the provision on Computer Science Summer Camps for second level students. In 2016 29 camps were funded nationally facilitating over 1,245 students. Each HEI was awarded €5,000 to support camps programmes. Camps typically target transition year students and run for a week. A particular focus is placed on the inclusion of girls, with some girls' only camps. In 2016 over 40% of participants were

female. The aim of the camps is to foster an interest in Computer Science as a potential third level option for second level students. HEI computing departments are centrally involved in supporting coder dojos, providing facilities to host dojos, third level computing students to run clubs and lecturers to provide mentoring strategies. HEIs link their computing camps and computing outreach activities to coderdojo activities and use these to foster greater links with secondary schools within their region.

This morning (March 20th), Minister Halligan and I announced additional funding of €2.25 Million to boost ICT Skills development with additional summer camps for second level students being developed, as well as up to 700 additional places on ICT courses.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) will write to higher education institutions to seek proposals for three calls:

- Additional ICT Summer Camps for second level students,

- Additional undergraduate places on core level 8 full-time courses

- A call for full-time level 9 MSc computing courses.

The promotion of STEM careers to students is part of the remit of Science Foundation Ireland who manage the SmartFutures initiative.

Special Educational Needs

260. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a person(details supplied) can continue education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13002/17]

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.

Parents/guardians of children with special educational needs, who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

The SENO can also advise parents in relation to supports which may be available to support children with special educational needs, including special transport arrangements which may be made available.

In addition, 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.

Special Educational Needs

261. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the National Behaviour Support Service removed 50% of funding support for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13006/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates 75 Behaviour for Learning Programme posts to schools through the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). The NBSS Behaviour for Learning Programme explore ways in which an individual teacher can develop a school 'Behaviour for Learning Programme' specifically targeted at students in need of intensive individualised intervention. The allocation under the Behaviour for Learning Programme is granted to schools on a yearly basis.

Over the past 4 years the NBSS has gradually reduced the number of schools with 2 teachers under the Behaviour for Learning Programme to allow for the granting of a Behaviour for Learning Programme teaching post to a greater number of schools.

NBSS began partnering the school, to which the Deputy refers, in the area of behaviour support in the 2008-2009 school year and in the 2010-2011 the school was allocated 2 Behaviour for Learning Programme teachers. The possible reduction in the Behaviour for Learning Programme allocation for 2017-2018 was first conveyed to school management in 2014. This allocation is being reduced to one teacher from the start of the 2017-2018 school year to allow another school with a similar profile and with similar student behaviour difficulties to benefit from the intensive, individualised support which the Behaviour for Learning Programme provides for their students.

Like all schools with Behaviour for Learning Programme Teachers, the school in question continues to have access to all student and teacher interventions and programmes under the NBSS behaviour in-school curricular framework including the support of an NBSS Regional Development Officer.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

262. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is not designated as a DEIS school. [13008/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage, including the school 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 identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Schools Building Projects Status

263. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be able to open its extension by September 2019; and if approval to proceed to stage 2B will be forthcoming in order that a planning application can be submitted in the coming weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13012/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school authority (Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Educational Training Board) was advised by my Department last week, following a review of it's Stage 2A (Developed Design Stage) submission, that it may now proceed to Stage 2B (Detail Design Stage) which includes the seeking of all statutory approvals including Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certificate and the Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of tender documents.

The timeframe for the further progression of the project through the tender and construction stages will necessarily be dependent on the timeframe for the school authority and its design team successfully completing stage 2B.

Until such time as planning permission has been secured and the project has progressed to and completed tender stage and the appointment of a building contractor, it will not be possible to provide an indicative timeframe for the completion of the construction stage of this project.

School Staff

264. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to rectify the situation whereby school secretaries not being employed directly by his Department have generally not received a pay rise in many years with the exception of a single 1% increase; if a small increase in capitation grants to schools directed specifically towards the employment costs of non teaching staff will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13013/17]

352. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Department circular 76/2015 in relation to pay increases for school secretaries is binding; if so, if all schools affected are implementing the pay increases according to the circular; if schools are not, the actions his Department is taking or will take in such cases; the assistance available from his Department to the affected secretaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13660/17]

353. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to the reply to parliamentary question number 149 of 8 March 2017, the number of staff still in place nationwide under the 1978 scheme referred to; if the ancillary grant scheme has any involvement in the payment of school secretaries; if provision for pensions for secretaries exists or is permitted under the use of the capitation grant to pay school secretaries; if he plans any further engagement with unions to resolve outstanding matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13661/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 264, 352 and 353 together.

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in primary and secondary schools. Staff employed on these schemes are paid directly by my Department and are not paid via grant funding. Currently there are a total of 420 people employed on these schemes. The 1978 and 1979 schemes are being phased out and have been superseded by a more extensive capitation grant scheme.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Capitation related grants are issued to the majority of primary and post-primary schools to employ school such staff. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of School Secretaries and Caretakers who are employed using grant funding and to enter an arbitration process. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for School Secretaries and Caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. My Department recently published circular letter 0080/2016 for primary schools and circular letter 0081/2016 for voluntary secondary schools, setting out the

application of the second phase increases of the Arbitrator's recommendations. The circulars are available at:

Circular 0080/2016 *http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0080_2016.pdf.*

Circular 0081/2016 *http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0081_2016.pdf.*

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrators recommendation applies. The circulars issued by my Department set out the revised rates of grant funding for schools and an application process by which schools can apply for additional funding in order to enable schools to pay the revised rates set out in the circulars.

Special Educational Needs

265. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for refusal of a special needs assistant for a person (details supplied). [13051/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including SNA support.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at *www.education.ie*, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. Responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports and resources to be allocated to schools to support individual pupils rests with the NCSE. It should be noted that SNA allocations are not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school.

The local SENO is available to discuss any concerns that parents have about the present or future educational needs of their child. All schools have the contact details of their local SENO. Contact details are also available on the NCSE website at *www.ncse.ie.* As the question which the Deputy asks relates to an individual child, the matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

Schools Review

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 311 of 28 February 2017, when the review in question will take place; and when the decisions based on this review will be made public. [13087/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This review is currently ongoing as part of the overall demographic analyses of all school planning areas nationwide at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

As this process is detailed and rigorous and will take some time to complete, it is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced later in 2017.

School Patronage

267. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on proposals to transfer patronage of schools through reconfiguration (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13095/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, following discussions on patronage divesting with education stakeholders and patron bodies in 2016, I recently announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area. This will involve the Education and Training Boards in the initial phase, as the State's local education authorities, identifying areas where there is likely to be demand for greater diversity and they will work with pre-school services to establish evidence of this demand among the cohort of pre-school parents. There will then be discussions between individual ETBs and the existing patrons/landowners concerning the possible transfer of schools to accommodate this demonstrated demand for diversity.

Each ETB will prepare a report for my Department outlining the levels of demand within their functional areas and the responses of the existing patrons as to how this might be accommodated through the reconfiguration of existing school provision.

In the subsequent and separate implementation phase, where the level of demand for multi-denominational schools is sufficient to justify transfer of a school from denominational to multi-denominational patronage, a process will commence to give effect to that. There will be a role for the existing patron/landowner in consulting with local community and school interests, including parents and taking into account proposals from different prospective multi-denominational patrons. It is envisaged that transfers will largely be by way of voluntary transfer of live schools by existing patrons.

This new process for supporting transfers of schools to multi-denominational patrons in response to the wishes of local families is based around principles of transparency and co-operation. Therefore, there will be a very substantial level of consultation of local communities in the process, both with the ETBs in the initial phase to establish evidence of demand by consulting pre-school parents and subsequently through the requirement for the existing patron to consult with local community and school interests in proposing to transfer patronage of an existing school to an alternative patron body. In that process, the existing patron will also take into account proposals from all prospective multi-denominational patrons that wish to be considered. In the final instance, an application for a formal transfer of patronage will have to be made by the existing patron under the Education Act 1998, which will require Ministerial approval.

It is important to acknowledge the voluntary nature of these transfers, given that the current patron is in most cases the owner of the land on which the school stands. My Department will develop protocols on patronage transfer with existing patrons to ensure that school and local communities and prospective patrons are fully consulted before a decision is made. I am confident that this process will respect the views of all parties - parents, local schools and communities and patrons.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, in 2017 and beyond. I would point out that the previous model of divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons. I believe that the new schools

reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system. In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

I look forward to working constructively with all education stakeholders and patron bodies in this important endeavour and I would ask all parties to put aside sectional or self interest in pursuing the national objective of providing greater diversity of school provision in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities.

Institutes of Technology

268. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will allocate direct once-off funding to the Mayo campus in Castlebar of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, similar to the Killybegs campus in Donegal to the tune of €3 million, in order that the Mayo campus can invest in developing new courses. [13110/17]

269. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will direct Galway Mayo Institute of Technology to consider not just the financial implications of cutting courses, but also the economic and social impact on the region which the campus serves (details supplied). [13111/17]

270. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider issuing a directive that funding from the HEA to the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology must include a defined amount of money to be ring fenced for the Mayo campus, in order to allow greater certainty for that campus and greater autonomy. [13112/17]

271. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will investigate the possibility and viability of the Mayo campus of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology becoming a stand alone entity, separate from the Galway campus, with its own autonomy in decision making and its own budget. [13113/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268 to 271, inclusive, together. My Department allocates the recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions including the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) such as Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution. Higher Education Institutions are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day to day affairs, including the allocation of all of its income (both public and private). They are also responsible for the provision and management of courses at their institution.

My Department and the HEA are aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) including GMIT. The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular are working closely with those Institutes operating in deficit to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate the deficit as quickly as possible.

In line with the HEA's policy for dealing with financially vulnerable institutes, GMIT has agreed a 3 year financial plan with the HEA to reach a balanced budget by 2017/18 and an external financial expert has been appointed to review the plan. GMIT has also identified a number of areas to address their financial position including implementation of a retention strategy, re-

view of offering versus other HEIs to try to increase demand and new programme development to bring increased student numbers.

The HEA and GMIT Governing Body have re-confirmed to my Department their commitment to implementing a viable development plan for the Castlebar campus as part of this process. GMIT has appointed an Interim Head of the campus in Castlebar to lead this process.

The Department and the HEA recognise the particular challenges attached to multi-campus provision in both GMIT and other institutes of technology. A major review of the funding allocation model of higher education has commenced and the review will look at how the future model can take account of the additional costs associated with these arrangements. My Department and the HEA are committed to such multi-campus provision, including Castlebar.

Funding overall for the higher education sector is a key concern for me, particularly in light of the additional pressure that will fall on the system over the next decade or so – an issue which is clearly set out in the Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education, which is currently with the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration. However, in seeking to address the issue in the short term, I have for the first time in nine years secured additional funding for the sector with €36.5m additional being made available this year and €160m additional overall over the next three years.

In addition, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and following a commitment in Budget 2017, I launched a public consultation process on 10 March 2017 on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training.

The proposed investment mechanism on which views are sought in the consultation process arises from a recommendation made in the 2016 report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education in order to more equitably reflect in funding terms the benefits derived by employers from the higher education sector.

Schools Building Projects Data

272. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the supplementary tender report regarding a school (details supplied); if final approval has now issued to sign contracts for construction of the new school; when construction will commence; the construction timetable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13117/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The School Authority was authorised to issue a Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer on 17th January 2017. The Design Team has informed my Department that the completed supplementary tender report will be forwarded to my Department this week and subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction could commence in the second quarter of 2017. The project is scheduled to take 24 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

273. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the design team for a school (details supplied) have submitted the stage 2b submission, including a review arising from changes in public work contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[13118/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school and its design team have not yet submitted the report to my Department. Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2b submission my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Schools Building Projects Status

274. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the tender documents and stage 2b documentation for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13119/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The documents referred to by the Deputy are awaited from the Design Team. Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2(b) report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Gaelcholáistí Issues

275. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the enrolment to the Irish medium Aonad at a school (details supplied) for September 2014, 2015 and 2016 demonstrates sufficient viability for the establishment of the gaelcholáiste for north Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13121/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the November 2015 announcement on the new primary and post-primary schools which will open in 2017 and 2018, and in view of the continued support for a Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to the continued viability of the Irish-medium Aonad at the school referred to by the Deputy.

My Department is continuing to monitor the enrolment trend for the Aonad and to work closely with the existing patron of the school referred to and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the establishment of the Gaelcholáiste within the timeframe outlined in the announcement of November 2015.

Army Barracks

276. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the Dún Uí Neill barracks site at Cavan town is no longer intended as an extended campus facility for Cavan Institute; his plans for this site; the main anchors of the alternative use now planned; the alternative arrangements that will now be made to facilitate Cavan Institute's floor space needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13139/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department understands that Cavan Monaghan ETB is currently considering various options in relation to the long-term future use of the accommodation facilities available on the Barrack's site. In that regard, my Department expects that the ETB will be in contact with my Department when it has advanced its consideration of the matter.

Intellectual Property Protocol

277. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Questions Nos 222, 223, 224, 225 and 226 of 7 March 2017, if his attention was drawn to breaches of policy in relation to intellectual property policy in higher education institutions since 2010, by year and institution, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13173/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Research is firmly on the national agenda with an investment of approximately €727m per annum being made by government into the publicly funded research system. This is aimed at building industry-relevant research capability and creating commercial opportunities through industry-academic research partnerships. This commitment by government is further reflected in Innovation 2020. The strategy recognises that companies being able to connect with and draw from the Irish research base is a vital component in driving competitiveness. Under Innovation 2020 the government has set a combined target of public & private investment in research to 2.5% of GNP by 2020.

The updated National IP Protocol published in early 2016 year signals commitment to innovation in business through access to State funded research and expertise. The Protocol which provides a national framework for engagement and is supported by the range of useful tools and documentation produced by Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI), facilitates simple transactions between the business and research communities in Ireland. Already we are seeing the benefits of such a framework as the national level of knowledge transfer activity increases.

In addition to the national framework set out in the IP Protocol, each of the research funding bodies has contracts and agreements which set out the requirements on HEIs, including in relation to knowledge transfer.

For example, as a funder of commercial and industry-academic research in the higher education sector, Enterprise Ireland's grant agreements have rigorous clauses to mitigate any conflicts of interest in funded research projects in Higher Education Institutions.

As part of the grant process, the applicant institutions must warrant, on their own behalf and on behalf of all individuals that are either currently associated with a project or individuals who may become associated with a project at a later stage, having made reasonable and diligent enquiries of them, that no conflict of interests arise from their participation in the project. In addition, during the term of the research project applicant institutions must take steps to ensure that the continued participation of any individual does not give rise to a conflict of interest.

These strict terms in each grant agreement necessitates Higher Education Institutions to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest in the research supported by Enterprise Ireland.

Established incidences of these types of event are a material breach of contract and there are a set or remedies also set out in the contract up to and including full repayment of the grant.

As outlined previously, responsibility to ensure implementation of IP policies is a matter for the relevant higher education institution. Research funders engage with HEIs in relation to individual grant agreements. I have not been informed of occasions where breaches of policy have occurred during the period referred to by the Deputy. *Question No. 278 withdrawn.*

Teacher Training Provision

279. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure

greater opportunities and courses are provided to train teachers to teach through the Irish language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13210/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department considers it important that there is an adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers including teachers qualified to teach through Irish available to meet the needs of primary and post primary schools. Accordingly, my Department asked the Teaching Council to consider the matter of teacher supply and the Council set up a Technical Working Group (TWG) to formulate advice on the matter.

The TWG's Report sets out an approach to planning which scopes out the work necessary to develop a model for teacher supply in the medium to long term. It recognises that the implementation of its recommendations will have significant resource implications, including staffing, and I will not be in a position to progress this aspect in the current year. The Action Plan for Education for 2017 includes commitments to progress the recommendations this year.

The Deputy will be aware of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, which contains a number of actions relating to improving the supply and quality of teaching through the medium of Irish at primary and post-primary level. These actions include the provision of a new Irish-medium initial teacher education (ITE) programme for primary teachers that addresses the needs of teachers in the Irish-medium sector and strengthening the supply of teachers from the existing post-primary ITE provider.

The actions in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education will be implemented on a phased basis commencing in 2017, as set out in the recently launched Action Plan for Education 2017. In accordance with the Action Plan, my Department intends commencing drafting of a tendering process for expanded ITE provision by the end of this year. The Policy on Gaeltacht Education includes September 2018 as the anticipated start date for the provision of new ITE programmes through the medium of Irish. This will be subject to interest levels from ITE providers at third level, potential student uptake, and agreement from relevant parties.

School Accommodation Provision

280. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current levels of demand for places in gaelcholáistí across the country; the extent to which his Department's recent demographic analysis took into account the demand for places in gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáistí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13211/17]

281. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions he is taking to ensure more communities are provided with access to gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáistí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13212/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 and 281 together.

For school planning purposes, my Department plans school provision across a framework of 314 school planning areas in order to assess and meet changing demographic needs throughout the country. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic analyses to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in an area, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. This patronage process incorporates consideration of, and the potential for, Irish-medium provision. It is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons, including patrons involved in Irish-medium provision and indeed any prospective patron which wishes to provide Irish-medium education, to apply for patronage of a new school under the patronage process. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of diversity currently available in the area, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

Following consideration of feedback from patrons, for the 2016 patronage process concerning the patronage of the nine new post-primary schools to open in 2017 and 2018 and the ongoing patronage process concerning the patronage of the four primary schools opening in 2017 and 2018, my Department has moved to incorporate the medium of instruction of a proposed new school as an integral part of the patronage assessment and recommendation process. In this regard, as part of the application process, prospective patrons must submit completed parental preferences and indicate their preference for their child(ren) to be educated through that patron's school model and also their preference with regard to education through the medium of English or Irish. The assessment process includes an analysis of the extent of diversity including language, already available in an area and the adjacent school planning areas.

As the Deputy will appreciate, my Department does not hold information in relation to lists of applicants or waiting lists of individual schools and therefore it is not possible to provide the details sought in relation to gaelcholáistí.

My Department will continue to make provision for Irish-medium education where it is feasible to do so.

International Students

282. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 116 of 7 March 2017, 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 he will make a statement on the matter. [13214/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not have a role in relation to organisations or agencies that arrange for international students to be placed with host families for the duration of their stay in the State. Accordingly, any child protection arrangements and Garda vetting requirements in respect of these organisations or agencies, including any child protection measures or requirements for Garda vetting in respect of the host families themselves, are primarily a matter for the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Justice and Equality respectively.

With regard to the attendance of these students in schools, my Department's child protection procedures apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and also apply to all students attending such schools regardless of the nationality or status of the students concerned. Garda vetting arrangements for the schools sector have been in place since 2006 and currently operate on a statutory basis with the commencement, last year, of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, by the Minister for Justice and Equality. This Act is an important part of the Government's suite of legislation to ensure that there are appropriate legal protections for children or vulnerable persons.

International Students

283. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to parliamentary question number 74 of 26 January 2017, if he will arrange for the information sought to be provided. [13219/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have now received the requested information from the Higher Education Authority.

The tables provide details of the fee charged to international non-EU students for each year studying medicine, for each university offering medicine as an undergraduate degree and for each academic year since 2010/2011. The table also provides the total fees collected by the universities in respect of such students.

University College Dublin	Non-EU tuition fee for undergraduate programme	Non-EU tuition fee for undergraduate programme - graduate-entry	Total non-EU fee income received
-	€	€	€'000
2010/11	€31,000.00	€39,200.00	€12,240.00
2011/12	€31,000.00	€39,200.00	€13,241.00
2012/13	€31,000.00	€44,000.00	€13,747.00
2013/14 *	€33,000.00	€44,000.00	€14,974.00
2014/15 *	€44,000.00	€48,000.00	€16,218.00
2015/16 *	€48,000.00	€50,000.00	€16,878.00
2016/17 * **	€48,000.00	€50,000.00	€17,763.00

*Fee is headline fee rate for new entrants. From 2014/15, continuing students remain on the fee rate in the year of entry to the Medicine programme.

** Estimated

Industrial Relations

284. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) has any rights with regard to the FTC in 2010, including maternity leave cover, job sharing and so on. [13224/17]

285. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) leaves the ASTI, the way in which they can make themselves available to his Department to go back into the Haddington Road agreement. [13225/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 285 together.

Decisions in respect of union membership are a matter for individual teachers and my Department does not have a position on this issue. Where teachers have questions as to the implications of joining or leaving a particular union, their questions should be directed to the relevant union.

The current position is that the Lansdowne Road Agreement as set out in Section 2 of Circular 0045/2016 applies to teachers employed in Education and Training Board schools and

centres (apart from Designated Community Colleges). The Agreement also applies to teachers employed in Designated Community Colleges, Community and Comprehensive Schools and Voluntary Secondary Schools who are TUI members. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2013 and 2015 as set out in Section 3 of the Circular applies to all other teachers employed in such schools. Circular 0045/2016 can be accessed at *http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0045_2016.pdf*

One of the benefits of the Lansdowne Road Agreement is the continuation of the Ward Report measures, which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before. The terms of the Report, as set out in Circular 0024/2015, reduced the service threshold from 'in excess of 4 years' to 'in excess of 2 years' in the case of a first Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) and 'in excess of 1 year' in the case of a subsequent CID.

Arising from the ASTI's repudiation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the improved CID arrangements set out in the Ward Report have been withdrawn in respect of teachers not covered by the Lansdowne Road Agreement. CID arrangements for such teachers have reverted to the previous arrangements, set out in Circular 0034/2009 which can be accessed at: *http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0034_2009.pdf*

An adjudication system exists which allows teachers who have been refused a CID, or who are unhappy with the hours of the CID where one is awarded, to submit an appeal to an independent Adjudicator for consideration. An appeal must be lodged within four weeks of the date that the teacher is notified of the decision by the employer to refuse a CID (or the date that the teacher is notified of the award and terms of the CID whose terms they are disputing). It would therefore not be possible to lodge an appeal at this stage in respect of a fixed-term contract held in the 2010/11 school year.

School Curriculum

286. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions his Department is taking to promote STEM third level education among female secondary level students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13236/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to building upon our provision of STEM education in primary, post-primary and third level education in order to ensure that we have the graduates to fulfil the existing and growing needs in STEM. Innovation 2020 - the Government's five-year strategy on research and development, science and technology, has the goal of making Ireland a global innovation leader, and by so doing, ensuring a strong and sustainable economy.

My Department's Action Plan for Education for 2016-2019 and the National Skills Strategy contain a clear commitment to supporting and developing STEM.

The STEM report published in November of last year by the STEM Education Review Group presents a detailed examination of the provision of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education in Ireland. It focussed on schools and on the necessary capacity building required to achieve a step-change in outcomes for learners that will benefit our society and the economy.

The recommendations proposed by the STEM Education Review Group are consistent with many existing and planned initiatives. They add considerable value to our thinking and will influence significantly the development (in the first half of 2017) of a STEM Education Policy

Statement and implementation plan. This will further support teaching and learning in Science and Mathematics at all levels of the education system.

A sustained system-wide focus on the implementation of actions to support numeracy as proposed in the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020, informed by the interim review of the Strategy which I published on the 14 March 2017.

Within our school system, STEM education is growing, while new initiatives will continue to support greater participation and improved performance in STEM. My Department is committed to curricular reform in relation to STEM, for example:

- Introduction of computer science subject at senior cycle in September 2019

- Introduction of new Science Syllabus for Junior Cycle in September 2016

- Development of a new primary mathematics curriculum which will support all children in the development of algorithmic and computational thinking to include coding

- New Science specification has been introduced for junior cycle students

- Junior Cycle mathematics specification to be published in 2017 and implemented in 2018.

Female participation in STEM remains an area for concern. There are significant gender differences in the selection of science subjects at Leaving Certificate. However, while girls studied STEM in fewer numbers than boys in the Leaving Certificate they performed at the same level if not better than their peers. It is hoped that the encouraging trends in maths, biology and chemistry will continue, and that we will see an increase in the numbers of girls taking the higher level paper in physics, engineering and the technology subjects.

Continued support by my Department of initiatives and programmes which promote female participation in STEM at primary and post-primary school such as I-Wish, the Smart Futures initiative, managed by Science Foundation Ireland which promotes STEM-related careers to both males and females and Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI) Gender Strategy which sets a target of 30% female award holders within SFI's portfolio by 2020.

The action plan for education commits as one of priority actions to addressing the gender imbalance in relation to STEM. We are committed to working to remove the obstacles which have so far served to limit the involvement of young women in the STEM area.

Minister Halligan and I announced yesterday (20 March) additional funding of €2.25 million to boost ICT skills development and additional summer camps for second level students being developed, as well as up to 700 additional places on ICT.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) will write to higher education institutions to seek proposals for three calls

- additional ICT summer camps for second level students

- Additional undergraduate places on core level 8 full-time courses

- A call for full-time 9 MSc computing courses.

Education Policy

287. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions his Depart-

ment is taking to promote entrepreneurship among female secondary level students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13237/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Work is currently under way on the development of an Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement. It is the intention that the policy statement, which it is proposed will be launched in the second quarter of 2017, will cover the whole of the education and training system, including primary and post primary schools.

New Entrepreneurship Education Guidelines for Schools will be issued following publication of the Entrepreneurship Education Policy Statement and will be informed by that statement.

International Students

288. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a survey (details supplied) which listed Ireland 47th out of 80 countries for studying abroad; his views on this rating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13238/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is not aware of the research methodology used in the preparation of this survey as referred to by the Deputy and is therefore not in a position to comment on its findings.

However, we are aware of other recent surveys in the area of international student satisfaction.

For example, an independent survey (Study Portals) has ranked Ireland No. 1 in the EU for international student satisfaction 2015 and 2016.

Third Level Funding

289. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of the funds allocated to third level institutions that is set aside for legal defence against student complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13248/17]

290. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department allows funds meant for education to be spent on legal expenses in view of the importance of the core service provision across third level institutions; if there are rules and regulations to the type of defence that can be funded from core funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13249/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 290 together.

My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including the Universities and Institutes of Technology. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of that funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

These institutions are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day to day affairs, including the allocation of all of its income (both public and private) and in relation to any legal issues which the institution is involved in.

Schools Building Projects

291. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Malahide and Portmarnock areas of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13250/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the building project for the new post-primary school to serve the Malahide and Portmarnock school planning areas is included in my Department's current six year construction programme. My Department is working towards the acquisition of a suitable site to provide the permanent location for this school and I can assure the Deputy that this acquisition is a priority for my Department.

The school will open as scheduled in September 2017 in suitable interim accommodation pending completion of construction.

Schools Building Projects

292. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Swords area of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13251/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the building project for the new post-primary school to serve Swords is included on my Department's six year construction programme.

My Department has worked closely with Fingal County Council in respect of this and conveyancing is currently underway in respect of a site for the permanent school accommodation.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am unfortunately not in a position to provide further details regarding the permanent location at this time. I can, however, assure the Deputy that the site acquisition process for this school is being advanced by my Department as a priority.

The school will open as scheduled in September 2017 in suitable interim accommodation pending completion of construction.

Schools Building Projects

293. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new site for a school (details supplied) as announced in November 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13253/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a school building project for the school to which he refers is included on my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department have been liaising with officials in the relevant Local Authority to acquire a site for the school in line with the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites, and this process is ongoing.

Due to the commercial sensitivities which attach to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further information at this time. However, the patron of the school in question will be informed of the proposed location as soon as it is possible to do so.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

294. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reply to a person following a meeting with him (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13281/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 4 November 2016 I met with a number of abuse survivors including the person referred to by the Deputy. A wide range of issues were raised with me at that meeting, mainly relating to the operations of Caranua (the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund). At the meeting I noted the statutory independence of Caranua and I outlined potential courses of action open to applicants to Caranua including recourse to the Ombudsman if there were concerns of maladministration and to the Public Accounts Committee if there were concerns over how monies were being disbursed. My officials subsequently relayed the concerns expressed at the meeting to Caranua. I am advised that the Chairperson of Caranua has offered to meet with the individual concerned in due course and that he will have an opportunity at that point to raise issues of concern directly.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

295. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13324/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since November 2011, when the one person one salary (OPOS) principle came into force, it has been a requirement that public servants and public sector employees (with the exception of worker directors of commercial state bodies) who sit on state boards may not be paid board fees.

The agencies under the aegis of my Department are aware of this one person one salary policy being in force and the necessity to adhere to this requirement.

School Accommodation

296. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for additional accommodation for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13334/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the school referred to has been approved a grant under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2017 to provide 5 mainstream classrooms. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority and it is now a matter for the school authority to advance the project.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

297. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of DEIS schools throughout counties Sligo and Leitrim over the past five years; the number planned; the number of unsuccessful applications; the status of any past or future review likely to address issues of concern for various education authorities seeking DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13352/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the list of DEIS schools by county is available on my Department's website by clicking on the following link.

http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/ .

As the Deputy may be aware the identification process was based on the use of centrally held data and was applied uniformly across the country, therefore there was no application process.

DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to *social_inclusion@education.gov.ie.*

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Schools Building Projects Status

298. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programmes at primary and second level in counties Sligo and Leitrim continue to proceed as planned having particular regard to the urgent requirement for school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13353/17]

299. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has received communications from various primary school authorities throughout counties Sligo and Leitrim regarding the provision of new facilities and buildings to meet requirements; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to respond in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13354/17]

300. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which primary school places and class requirements in counties Sligo and Leitrim have been and continue to be met; if class sizes in those counties fall within the national average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13355/17]

309. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in counties Sligo and Leitrim likely to benefit from refurbishment or replacement in 2017; the extent to which adequate budgetary provisions have been made in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13364/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 298 to 300, inclusive, and 309 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department consistently monitors demographics to identify where additional school places will be required.

My Department's six-year capital programme priorities building projects for these areas, including Counties Sligo and Leitrim. In this regard, three major capital projects in County Sligo and one major capital project in County Leitrim are being progressed. The capital programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of such funding approved in all schools, including Sligo and Leitrim is available on my Department's website and this is updated regularly.

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

Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demographic need, curriculum reform, additional guidance posts, additional resource teaching posts, addition teaching support for DEIS schools and the strengthening of school leadership.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

Teacher Recruitment

301. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which primary and secondary level teaching posts have been approved in respect of primary and second level schools in counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which this is expected to favourably impact teaching conditions in the schools in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13356/17]

310. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he will augment the career guidance service throughout second level education in counties Sligo and Leitrim; his views on whether there will be an improvement in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13365/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 and 310 together.

Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to all schools is published annually on my Department's website. The teacher allocation process operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools in the next school year.

This includes 680 posts to meet rising demographic needs at both primary and post primary level, 900 additional special education teachers to cover both sectors, 550 additional posts arising from Junior Cycle professional time, 100 posts arising from enhancements to guidance and 170 posts arising from enhancements to school leadership.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 also has a specific action to enhance guidance counselling at second-level as resources permit. A significant move was made in the 2016/17

school year with the restoration of half of the cut in provision for guidance counselling. This was the equivalent to the restoration of 300 posts.

The allocation of a whole time equivalent of an additional 100 teachers to second level schools in Budget 2017 is a restoration of a further 16% of the teaching resources that were removed.

The delivery of this 16% restoration in addition to the 50% restoration in Budget 2016, means that two thirds of the Guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012 will be restored in our schools with effect from September 2017.

The 400 posts will be provided in respect of Guidance as a separate allocation on school's staffing schedules. The guidance allocation shown separately on the staffing schedules represents 0.4 of the PTR for each school. DEIS schools will have a guidance allocation of 1.15 of the PTR which represents the total guidance allocation that was restored to these schools.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

302. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of places for special needs students available at primary and second level schools throughout counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which further improvements are required in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13357/17]

303. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate school places are available at primary and second level for children with autism in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13358/17]

304. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate special needs assistants are available throughout both primary and second level schools in counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which it is expected to address specific deficiencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13359/17]

305. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to continue to monitor special needs teaching requirements of teachers and special needs assistants at primary and second level in all schools throughout counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which he expects to be in position to meet the increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13360/17]

306. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which children with autism continue to have ready access to primary and second level school places in counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which any difficulties have arisen in meeting the ongoing requirements in both counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13361/17]

312. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to ensure adequate resource teachers remain available throughout all schools in counties Sligo and Leitrim; his plans for augmentation in specific areas of particular need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13367/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 302 to 306, inclusive, and 312 together.

Funding for special education provision in 2017 is estimated to amount to some €1.68 bil-

lion, which is equivalent to over 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and an increase of 12% in spending in the past two years. This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

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

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

At my request, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are currently undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme and I have specifically asked the NCSE to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

As part the Budget announcements, I announced that an additional 115 Special Needs Assistants (SNA) posts at an annual cost of €3.75m will be provided for allocation in 2017, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation to schools to 13,015 to the end of 2017. This represents an increase of 23% over the numbers available in 2011, which was 10,575. This is a higher level of SNA support than ever before, which ensures that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

There are over 12,500 Learning Support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2016/2017 school year of which 7430 are Resource Teaching posts. This represents an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers which have been allocated since the 2011/12 school year, at which point 5265 posts were allocated. In addition, over 5000 learning support posts have been allocated to schools under the General Allocation Model for primary schools and Learning Support allocations for post primary schools.

A new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools has been introduced and will commence in schools 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.

An additional €18 million will be provided in 2017 to provide for around 900 additional resource teacher posts.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, also has responsibility for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas, as required and must take into account the present and future potential need, location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas. The NCSE is currently engaging with schools in open-

ing special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision.

There are currently 1,153 Special Classes in place, in comparison to 548 in 2011, with approximately 150 new classes having been made available for the current school year.

The NCSE has advised that there are 14 special classes for children with autism in Counties Sligo and Leitrim. These special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day. Special class for students with ASD are staffed 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 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in Counties Sligo and Leitrim, are available on www.ncse.ie in county order.

In recent years, the NCSE has provided my Department with a number of policy advice papers on the provision of supports for children with special needs, all of which are available on the NCSE's website.

It is intended to bring into effect many improvements to the provision of special educational needs support, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required, to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education, will be provided.

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

School Patronage

307. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to continue support for smaller urban or rural schools with a denominational ethos in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13362/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is very aware of the importance of smaller urban or rural schools to their communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities.

To sustain primary schools in these communities my Department has a more favourable staffing schedule for small schools that are more than 8km distant from the next nearest school of the same type of patronage and language of instruction. This measure is designed to provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools.

With regard to school ethos, the government supports the concept of parental choice in our school system, whether that be a choice for denominational or multi-denominational education.

In regard to retaining small schools, a specific commitment is given in the Programme for a Partnership Government not to close any small school without the consent of parents. I am mindful of the concerns of small schools and will take these into account in considering any planning for future provision.

Further Education and Training Programmes

308. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to ensure the education system at all levels is in a position to meet the skills demand in the workplace with regard to counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which apprenticeships are likely to impact on the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13363/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): A number of strategies have been developed by the education and training system at all levels to meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace. Last year my Department published the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 both of which contain over 100 actions designed to see the system become the best in Europe over the next decade. Some of these actions are specifically aimed at ensuring that the labour force has access to education and training provision that equips them with the skills that enterprise needs, now and in the future.

In 2016, as part of the National Skills Strategy 2025, nine Regional Skills Fora, including one in the North West covering counties Sligo and Leitrim, were established. The North West Regional Skills Forum has identified a number of sectors including the manufacturing and retail sectors where there are skills needs. In order to address these skills needs the Forum has, and will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders.

SOLAS are currently developing a Further Education and Training Policy Framework to provide for employee development. The Policy Framework, due to be published in Q2 2017, is intended to support FET provision for the development of those at work across the Country.

In relation to Apprenticeships, the Apprenticeship Council, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers, is currently overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas of the economy. Recently we have seen the first of these new apprenticeships coming on stream with the launch of the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, developed jointly by the Insurance Institute of Ireland and the Institute of Technology Sligo, in September 2016. The new Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship also got underway last year, commencing in November 2016. 13 further new apprenticeships are due to get underway later this year in various sectors including medical devices, polymer processing and financial services.

Question No. 309 answered with Question No. 299.

Question No. 310 answered with Question No. 301.

Education Grants

311. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of higher education grant applications received, pending, approved and refused for the current academic year in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13366/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy on the number of higher education grant applications received and their current status for the current academic year in counties Sligo and Leitrim is set out in the table.

Leitrim and Sligo Applicants for the current year (2016-17)

Home Address County	Status Award/Ref/Can	2016-17
Leitrim	Awarded	842
Leitrim	Cancelled	30
Leitrim	Refused	134
Leitrim	Total	1,006
Sligo	Awarded	1,482
Sligo	Cancelled	70
Sligo	Refused	312
Sligo	Pending Documentation	6
Sligo	Total	1,870

Question No. 312 answered with Question No. 306.

Teacher Recruitment

313. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of available substitute teachers in County Kildare; his plans to address the serious shortage of available substitute teachers nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13406/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not hold any information on the number of available substitute teachers in any county, including County Kildare.

In overall terms the Department has no evidence of a recent or current general shortage of teachers, including for substitute positions. However, I am aware that some schools are experiencing difficulty in recruiting substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The Deputy will be aware that a Technical Working Group (TWG) was set up by the Teaching Council to formulate advice on teacher supply.

The TWG's interim report identified the significant challenges in developing a model of workforce planning for teachers in Ireland. It is complex at post primary level because there is currently no central mechanism for matching the overall subject need requirements of schools with output from the education providers and, in addition, schools have significant autonomy in relation to the mix of subjects and choices they provide for students.

The TWG's final Report sets out an approach to planning which scopes out the work necessary to develop a model for teacher supply in the medium to long term. It recognizes that the implementation of its recommendations will have significant resource implications, including staffing. The Action Plan for Education for 2017 contains commitments to progress the recommendations this year.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

314. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Kildare has been notified of the removal of DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13407/17]

321. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's reasons for proposing to withdraw supports from a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13513/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 and 321 together.

The school referred to by the Deputies was established on 1st September 2011 following the amalgamation of a number of schools in the area.

Where amalgamations take place, comprising DEIS and Non-DEIS schools, DEIS status is not transferred to the newly amalgamated school. Notwithstanding this fact, my Department continues to provide some additional non-teaching resources in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS schools, by way of continued support for the targeted cohort of pupils as a transitional measure. In the case of a post-primary school, these supports are provided for six years.

As the school referred to has now been operating for six years, and, given that the cohort of pupils from the former DEIS schools will have completed their second level education at the end of the current school year, the additional DEIS related resources from which this school has benefited, will be discontinued with effect from the end of the current school year i.e. 31st August 2017.

As the Deputy is aware all schools including the school in question were assessed for the new DEIS and this school did not qualify at that time. Only schools with the highest level of concentrated disadvantage were identified as being at the same level as the current DEIS category for schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

The next opportunity for this school will be in the autumn when the Department updates its identification process.

There is a verification process under the new DEIS Plan and any schools wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of their pupil cohort should submit an application for this verification to socialinclusion@education.gov.ie.

School Meals Programme

315. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is responsible for informing the Department of Social Protection of increased pupil numbers in primary schools that are in receipt of school meals programme funding; the way in which this information is supplied to the Department of Social Protection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13416/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department has provided DSP with basic school data, including total number of pupils, in comma-separated value (CSV) format to assist DSP in the development of their new School Meals Programme application.

Schools Building Projects Status

316. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied). [13441/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project for the school to which the Deputy refers is one of the research strands in the programme for the introduction of Nearly Zero Energy School Buildings. Nearly zero-energy means a building that has a very high energy performance. The project is currently at a detailed stage of design, tender documentation is being prepared by the Design Team and expressions of interest from suitably qualified contractors has been sought.

It is anticipated the project shall proceed to tender during the 2nd quarter of 2017, with construction to commence before the end of the year.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

317. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names of schools in counties Longford and Westmeath that applied for DEIS status or for enhanced DEIS status; the reason these applications were refused; and the appeal mechanism open to them. [13443/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the list of DEIS schools by county is available on my Department's website by clicking on the following link.

http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/.

As the Deputy may be aware the identification process was based on the use of centrally held data and was applied uniformly across the country, therefore there was no application process.

DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie.

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which

warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Home Tuition Scheme Eligibility

318. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special consideration can be given to the family of a person (details supplied) in order to allow payment of the July provision for 2017 to be approved for home tuition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13469/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department of Education and Skills provides for the education of children through the provision of recognised schools. Recognised schools must fulfil a number of conditions regarding curriculum, inspection and other matters.

The July Education Programme (or July Provision Grant Scheme) provides funding for an extended school year for children with a severe/profound general learning disability and/or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in recognised schools. Under this scheme the school year of recognised schools is extended by four weeks for eligible pupils. Where school-based provision is not feasible, home-based provision may be granted.

Where parents choose to educate their children in places other than recognised schools they have made a decision not to avail of recognised schools. As a result they are not eligible to avail of resources, including the July Education Programme, which they may have accessed through enrolment in a recognised school.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parent of the child and the Board of Management of a school. However, parents who may need advice or assistance in transitioning their child to primary school, or are experiencing difficulties in securing a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie

Schools Establishment

319. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an Educate Together school will be built in the Whitehall area of Dublin north west; if so, the timeframe set out for the building of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13474/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For planning purposes the Whitehall area is located in the Department's Whitehall_Santry_Dublin 9 school planning area. There are currently 10 primary schools serving this area.

My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources including 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.

My Department will continue to review the demographics nationwide in light of updated enrolment and child benefit data and also of the impact of planned capacity increases in this and adjoining areas. Any outcomes arising out of this review will inform decisions regarding the provision of any additional school places which may be identified as a result.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

320. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools which, following amalgamation, have received reduced DEIS related supports, that is not full DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13512/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy, that in the past five years, from the 2012-2013 school year to date, there were 9 cases of amalgamations between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. This includes schools in both the Primary and Post Primary Sector.

Where amalgamations occur comprising DEIS and Non-DEIS schools, DEIS status is not transferred to the newly amalgamated school. Notwithstanding this fact, my Department continues to provide some additional non-teaching resources in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS schools, by way of continued support for the targeted cohort of pupils as a transitional measure. In the case of a post-primary school these non-teaching supports are provided for six years. In the case of a primary school these non-teaching supports are provided for eight years.

Question No. 321 answered with Question No. 314

Schools Building Projects Status

322. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13522/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a new school building project for the school referred is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The project brief is being finalised by my Department with a view to advancing the proj-

ect into the architectural planning process. My Department will be in further contact with the school in this regard.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

323. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding special needs assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13523/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates S support to schools, in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, in order that students who have special educational needs and additional care needs can access S support as and when it is needed.

The purpose of the S scheme is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs.

The scheme provides for the allocation of a quantum of S support to schools, taking into account the assessed care needs of individual children with disabilities, or severe medical needs. The scheme is not limited only to children who have been assessed as having specified categories of disability.

Schools who wish to make applications for S support should apply to the NCSE.

At my request, the NCSE have commenced a comprehensive review of the S scheme in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA) and in that context to:

- Identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and

- Recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The NCSE will report to me on the progress of this review in May 2017.

Officials in my Department are in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and a decision in respect of the appropriate levels of S supports for the school will be taken following a review by the NCSE of existing allocations and of students needs in the school.

School Transport

324. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cases in which taxis are engaged to transport children to schools; the number of school children involved; and the amount spent annually per county. [13528/17]

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.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school that is resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills' criteria.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service.

Where practicable, and subject to consideration of cost and logistics, the Department will consider, based on information provided by the SENO, Parents/Guardians, School Authorities etc. the provision of specific/individual transport arrangements in circumstances where travel in the company of other children is not deemed feasible.

These services are subject to periodic review and may be withdrawn and/or replaced with an alternative service/grant where circumstances change. Examples of such changed circumstances, which are not exhaustive, include other children applying for transport or a child's independence increasing to the extent that an individual service is no longer necessary.

Bus Éireann has advised that there are currently over 11,500 children travelling on taxi services each school day.

The approximate cost of these services on a per County basis is as follows:-

County	Cost
Carlow	€832,284
Cavan	€618,787
Clare	€501,329
Cork	€6,002,464
Donegal	€444,324
Dublin	€5,607,303
Galway	€733,647
Kerry	€256,383
Kildare	€1,185,657
Kilkenny	€1,145,580
Laois	€228,659
Leitrim	€54,168
Limerick	€289,689
Longford	€342,393
Louth	€489,159
Mayo	€315,309
Meath	€658,617
Monaghan	€286,294
Offaly	€842,532
Roscommon	€331,025
Sligo	€145,668
Tipperary	€1,396,473

County	Cost
Waterford	€577,914
Westmeath	€734,562
Wexford	€652,944
Wicklow	€157,563

Schools Building Projects Status

325. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the assessment process for an application for a school (details supplied) will be complete; when moneys are likely to be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13537/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has approved grant to the school in question to construct a mainstream classroom and the school has been advised accordingly.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme Data

326. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a detailed breakdown by religious order of the money and assets transferred to date to the State in respect of the agreement between the State and the religious orders to share the cost of redress for the victims of abuse in certain institutions; the amount of a contribution that was promised from each such religious order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13539/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2002 Indemnity Agreement between the Government and religious congregations provided for a collective contribution of €128 million from the 18 participating congregations in cash, counselling services and property.

The cash contributions of €54.42m under the Agreement have been received while information has been provided to my Department that confirms that counselling services in excess of the €10m provided for in the agreement have been funded directly by the contributing congregations.

With regard to property, my Department agreed in principle with CORI, under whose auspices the Agreement was negotiated, that a total of 64 properties would be accepted under the Agreement subject to good and marketable title and agreed valuations. This number was reduced to 61 when the Department accepted and received a cash sum in lieu of three properties where good and marketable title could not be established. A total of 50 properties have been fully transferred and there are no outstanding issues. These properties are valued at €48.47 million in total. When combined with the cash and counselling contributions referred to above, a total of €112.9 million representing 88% of the amount provided for in the Agreement has been received.

Work to complete the outstanding property transfers is actively progressing and I should point out that in most of the remaining cases the transfer process is at a very advanced stage. It is worth noting also that most of the properties are already in use by the intended recipients.

As the Agreement provided for a collective contribution it is not possible to provide a complete breakdown of the contributions on a congregational basis.

For the sake of completeness I should point out that in response to the call for further substantial contributions towards the costs of redress made in the aftermath of the publication of the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report), many of the congregations that were party to the 2002 Indemnity Agreement made offers which, in total, were valued at €352.6m. I should stress that these offers are voluntary and do not form part of any agreement.

One significant element of the most recent offer, relating to playing fields and associated lands, valued at €127million, was withdrawn by the Christian Brothers. When this is combined with some changes in the valuation of properties previously offered, the total value of the voluntary offers currently in place stands at €193 million, of which contributions of cash and property amounting to some €96.1 million have been realised.

When the contributions provided for in the 2002 Agreement are combined with the subsequent voluntary offers, the maximum total contribution that might be realised stands at €321 million of which amount €209 million has been received.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

327. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) was not included on the recently announced rural DEIS schools list; if he will re-examine this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13553/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage, including the school 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 identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Student Universal Support Ireland Data

328. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of appeals received by SUSI in each year since the authority was introduced in 2012; the number of these appeals which were successful in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13566/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy on the number of appeals received and overturned by SUSI since its establishment in 2012, is set out in the table.

Appeals received by SUSI from 1st Sept 2012 - 31st August 2016

Academic Year	Total Appeals Received SUSI	Decisions Overturned	Overturned because of New Information
2013-14	6525	3906	2181
2014-15	4148	1938	1520
2015-16	5805	2691	2419

Student Universal Support Ireland Data

329. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of appeals received by the student grant's appeals board in each year since SUSI was introduced in 2012; the number of these appeals which were successful in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13567/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy on the number of appeals received and overturned by the Student Grants Appeals Board since the establishment of SUSI in 2012, is set out in the table.

Academic Year	Total Appeals Received SGAB	SUSI Appeals Officer Decisions Overturned
1st September 2012 - 31st August 2013	783	201
1st September 2013 - 31st August 2014	923	239
1st September 2014 - 31st August 2015	664	177
1st September 2015 - 31st August 2016	774	284

Superannuation Schemes

330. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) who has submitted a completed SHF1 form regarding service as a part-time teacher may expect to have service history transferred to the Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board for the purpose of pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13572/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Requests for transfer of service for superannuation purposes under the Public Sector Transfer Network are dealt with by my Department in an order of priority with the highest priority afforded to those closest to retirement. The part-time service, as a primary teacher, of the person to whom the Deputy refers has now been transferred for pension purposes to the WWETB.

Garda Vetting Legislation

331. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons whose work involves visiting different schools, for example a yoga instructor, has to undergo separate Garda vetting in respect of each school they visit; his views on whether this is a waste of public resources; if he will arrange to put a system in place whereby such persons can be Garda vetted once for visits to different schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13578/17]

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 in relevant work with children or vulnerable persons.

The Vetting Act provides that a relevant organisation must, other than in certain limited circumstances, obtain a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau prior to employing, contracting, placing or permitting a person to undertake relevant work with children or vulnerable adults. However, Section 3 of the Vetting Act sets out that the Act does not apply to a person who is assisting at a school on an occasional and unpaid basis provided that assistance does not include the coaching, mentoring, counselling, teaching or training of children or vulnerable persons

The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau

fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. However, 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 Question (FAQ) document was also published by my Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular.

The Vetting Act allows for some limited exemptions to the requirement under section 12(1) of the Vetting Act to obtain a vetting disclosure from the Bureau prior to employing, contracting, placing or permitting a person to undertake relevant work or activities with children or vulnerable persons. Information about these exemptions are set out in sections 5.3 and 6.4 of my Department's circular.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

332. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) was not approved for DEIS status; the criteria used to make the decision; the reason the school did not meet the various criteria thresholds; if he will accept an appeal to the decision by the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is the availability of a new identification process for the assessment of schools for inclusion in DEIS using centrally held CSO and DES data.

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. Schools were not required to submit an application for inclusion in the programme as the necessary centrally held data is already available to my Department.

Further information on the development of the identification process 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-/.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage, including the school 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 identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

333. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) was not approved for DEIS status; the criteria used to make the decision; the reason the school did not meet the various criteria thresholds; if he will accept an appeal to the decision by the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13585/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is the availability of a new identification process for the assessment of schools for inclusion in DEIS using centrally held CSO and DES data.

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 dis-

advantage 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. Schools were not required to submit an application for inclusion in the programme as the relevant centrally held data was available to my Department.

Further information on the development of the identification process 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-/.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

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The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly

allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Third Level Institutions Mergers

334. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to progress in talks between Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology regarding the proposed merger of the two third level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13586/17]

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

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

The Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) project was initiated in 2011 and consists of a consortium of two Institutes of Technology; Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

The TUSE consortium made good progress initially and submitted a Stage 1 expression of interest in 2012. However, following this initial promising start, the consortium encountered a series of challenges and difficulties and did not succeed in finalising a Stage 2 Plan prior to the decision by WIT to suspend all merger activities in October 2014.

Following meetings with both Institutes, in early November 2014, the then Minister for Education and Skills announced the establishment of a new process of engagement and consultation, with the governing bodies, staff and students of both Institutes, together with the wider community in the South-East, in order to articulate and develop the following:

- A shared vision for a Technological University to serve the South-East region;

- To report to the Minister on the feasibility and steps required to progress an application for technological university status within an acceptable timeframe. This to be done, having regard to the published criteria and process for designation as technological university which is already in place.

The Minister appointed Mr. Michael Kelly to lead the process of consultation. His report presented a compelling rationale for a new type of higher education institution to support a "step-change" in the economic and social development of the entire South-East region. This is clearly the overwhelming wish of stakeholders in the region.

Following the publication of the Michael Kelly report, a preliminary facilitation process which was recommended in the Report has since been completed. There was strong engage-

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

Strategic vision for TUSE

The core elements of a new agreed vision and values for the Technologic University of the South East have already been set out by both Institutes and includes a commitment to:

- A systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world;

- Advancing knowledge through research and scholarship;

- Dissemination of this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise;

- Particular regard to the needs of the region.

Funding:

Both Institutions made a joint presentation and submission to the Higher Education Authority (HEA), seeking funding to underpin the next phase of engagement. This was part of the latest call issued by the HEA regarding the restructuring of the higher education landscape. The call sought submissions for funding support in respect of the costs arising from mergers as part of the implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education.

Arising from the submissions received and subsequent detailed presentations made to the HEA, the TUSE project were allocated a ring-fenced sum of €1.445 Million in 2016 to support the further development of the project.

Legislation:

In relation to the legislation, to underpin the development of Technological Universities, the third Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage.

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

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

National Educational Psychological Service Data

335. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of assessments that have been carried out by the National Educational Psychological Service for each class level for primary school pupils, that is junior infants, senior infants and so on, or alternatively by year of age, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[13587/17]

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

In relation to SCPA assessments my Department processes payment returns from schools certifying satisfactory delivery of an assessment. It does not centrally record the age or class of the child/ pupil undergoing assessment.

Referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists do have a range of detail recorded on the NEPS Casetrack database and I attach for the Deputy's information a breakdown of such referrals in primary schools in 2015/16 by age of pupil.

Number of referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists in Primary schools 2015/16 by age of pupil:

Age	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Referrals	46	522	659	800	868	803	691	660	978	492	6,519

National Educational Psychological Service Data

336. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of psychologists in each National Educational Psychological Service office in tabular form; the total number of schools the office covers; the vacancies in each office; the administrative support in each office; the area covered by each office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13588/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's National Educational Psychological Service is based on a regional structure with eight divisions and 23 offices servicing primary and post-primary in their respective hinterlands. While each office generally services schools within a given county or counties the process is not a rigid one and allows for flexibility in responding to local geography and staff availability between offices as appropriate.

I attach for the Deputy's information a list of these offices, their staffing levels, including current vacancies and the count of schools that fall into each of their catchment areas.

The Deputy will be aware that following completion of a recent national recruitment competition the Public Appointments Service (PAS) has developed regional panels from which the 11 vacancies currently existing in NEPS psychologist staffing numbers will be filled. This process is currently ongoing and it is envisaged that it will be completed before the end of the academic year.

Furthermore under the Programme for Government NEPS psychologist number will be increased by a further ten posts in the current year, these personnel should be in place by the commencement of the 2017/18 academic year.

Detail of NEPS Office Staffing, Vacancies and Counties serviced 2017:

NEPS Region	Office	No. Sch	Psych Staff w.t.e	Vacancies w.t.e.	Admin w.t.e.	Counties Covered
Dublin	Clondalkin	82	5.6		1.0	Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan
	Frederick Court	265	17.6	1.0	1.3	Nth City and County Dublin
Total		347	23.2	1.0	2.3	
Dublin/Mid Leinster	Blackrock	262	11.4	1.0	1.2	Sth East Dublin, East Wicklow
	Clondalkin	79	4.5		1.0	Dublin West
	Naas	149	8.9		1.0	Kildare, East Wicklow
Total		490	24.8	1.0	3.2	
Mid-Munster	Clonmel	117	3.7			Sth. Tipperary, some Cork
	Cork	416	17.7	1.0	2.5	Cork
Total		533	21.4	1.0	2.5	
North-East	Cavan	154	3.8	1.0	0.5	Cavan, Monaghan
	Drogheda	105	6.0		1.0	Louth, some Meath & Monaghan
	Navan	131	5.6	3.0	1.0	Meath
Total		390	15.4	4.0	2.5	
North-West	Letterkenny	198	7.2		1.0	Donegal
	Mullingar	152	7.0		1.0	Westmeath, Longford, some Offaly
	Sligo	124	3.7		1.0	Sligo, Leitirm
Total		474	17.9		3.0	
South-East	Kilkenny	168	6.5			Carlow, Kilkenny
	Portlaoise	120	4.0	1.0		Laois, Offaly
	Waterford	93	4.6		1.0	Waterford
	Wexford	123	4.8	1.0	1.0	Wexford
Total		504	19.9	2.0	2.0	
South-West	Ennis	133	4.6			Clare
	Limerick	245	9.4		1.0	Limerick, Tipperary Nth.
	Tralee	165	6.0		1.0	Kerry, some Limerick
Total		543	20.0		2.0	
West	Castlebar	188	4.0	1.0	0.5	Mayo
	Galway	275	9.5	1.0	1.0	Galway
	Roscommon	103	3.0			Roscommon, some Galway

NEPS Region	Office	No. Sch	Psych Staff w.t.e	Vacancies w.t.e.	Admin w.t.e.	Counties Covered
Total		566	16.5	2.0	1.5	
NEPS Head Office	Marlborough St.		2.0		8.6	
Grand Total			161.2	11.0	27.6	

Note: The Clonmel, Kilkenny, Portlaoise and Roscommon receive administrative back-up from the main offices in their respective Regions

National Educational Psychological Service Data

337. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount of payments per annum by the National Educational Psychological Service to the scheme for the commissioning of psychological assessments, SCPA, panel over the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13589/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The table sets out the cost of assessment paid in each of the last five years under my department's Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

Amounts paid to panelists under the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments - by year 2012-2016:

Calendar Year	Cost €
2012	642,330
2013	626,240
2014	494,912
2015	583,680
2016	626,848

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

338. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any of the 900 additional resource teachers recruited to implement the new resource allocation model will form part of the inclusion support service; the number of same that will form part of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13590/17]

339. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process for schools that wish to access supports for children with special educational needs under the inclusion support service; the range of supports that will be available; if additional resource hours will be available under the service; the criteria to avail of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13591/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 338 and 339 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, 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's 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 in each school.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs.

The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

It is expected that the majority of schools will be able to manage their resources to provide additional teaching support to all children who need such support in their schools, in accordance with the guidelines.

A small number of schools may require access to NCSE Support Service in cases where they consider that the management and deployment of the allocation cannot meet the needs of the students in their school. In such cases the school should set out to the NCSE the manner in which it has deployed its allocation and the difficulties the school has encountered.

The supports available through the NCSE Support Service, where appropriate, will enable schools to build professional capacity in the school and support schools in responding to exceptional circumstances. This support need not always be in the form of additional teaching support but may involve the promotion of effective teaching strategies, assisting teachers in developing a classroom environment to promote positive behaviour and/or developing capacity to respond to challenging behaviour

Support is provided in the current 2016/17 school year through NCSE Special Educational Needs Organisers, the National Behavioural Support Service, the Special Educational Support Service, and the Visiting Teachers for Pupils with Visual or Hearing Impairment.

Further information will be made available to schools shortly in relation to the manner in which schools can access supports through the NCSE Support Service for the 2017/18 school year, which is the date from which the new school allocations under the new model becomes effective from.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

340. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports that will be available to schools under the new resource allocation model in cases in which a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school or additional complex needs are identified by the school subsequent to their allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13592/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

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 key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, 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's 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 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 schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. 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, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

The new allocations to schools will include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

All allocations to schools include a supplementary provision, which has been referred to as the 'baseline allocation' which is allocated over and above the profiled allocation.

For students who start school from September 2017, with a specific diagnosis, either in junior infants or transferring from another school, the resources they need will already be in the school under the new model.

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 generally, a school's profile will 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. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie. Should a school wish to appeal they should do so by March 31st 2017.

Schools will be able to appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools should read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relates to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The model will allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. 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.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

Special Educational Needs Data

341. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if details of the resource allocation for each school will be published; the date on which; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13593/17]

343. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of additional resource hours that have been allocated to schools under the new resource allocation model; the number of schools that received additional hours under the new model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13595/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions No. 341 and 343 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers

to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

To date, 770 of the additional 900 teaching posts have been allocated to schools. Some schools are still due to receive allocations as they are newly opening schools, schools which are amalgamating from September 2017, or where adjustments are required to be made to the allocations.

Of the total allocations made to schools to date, 1358 schools have so far received increased allocations under the new allocation model, including 1036 primary schools, and 322 post primary schools.

Details of the allocations which have been made for each school have been published on the National Council for Special Education website www.ncse.ie.

No school has received an allocation for the 2017/18 school year which is less than their total allocation for special education support for the 2016/17 school year. 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 in each school.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

342. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appeals mecha-

nism will be available for parents under the new resource allocation when they are of the view their child is not receiving sufficient supports; if he will outline this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13594/17]

345. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce any mechanism of oversight in relation to the way in which resource hours are used in schools as part of the new model; if this was a recommendation of the NCSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13597/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 342 and 345 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, combined with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March while details of the special education teaching allocations have been published on the NCSE website.

Under the previous General Allocation Model, each school decided the level of support required to be provided to children with learning difficulties and certain special educational needs e.g. high incidence special educational needs. We know that schools have done this well.

We also know that under the pilot of the new allocation model that was conducted in 2015/16 that schools welcomed the discretion that they had to allocate resources under the new allocation model to pupils based on their individual learning needs, as opposed to primarily based on a diagnosis of a disability.

A category of disability, by itself, does not identify how much support a child should receive – two students, with the same disability can need completely different levels of support.

Schools use their own knowledge of their students to allocate teaching supports and they can also call on a wide number of support services to assist them. These include the Visiting Teacher Service, NEPS, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) and other support services such a the Special Educational Support Services. Under the new allocation model, schools will continue to receive guidance when making decisions about supporting students' learning needs.

Guidelines for schools on supporting children with special educational needs under the new allocation model are also currently being prepared and will be published shortly.

Under the new model, schools will be guided as to how to identify pupils for additional teaching support and how to prioritise pupils for support taking into account the extent of their learning needs in order to ensure the appropriate level of support is being given to the child.

Schools should inform parents about this process and how to request a review of their child's additional teaching support, if this is required.

However, despite these measures, some parents, might still disagree with the level of support being given to their child. In such cases parents should discuss this first with their child's class/subject teacher or his/her support teacher.

If parents remain unhappy with the level of support being given to their child in a school they may then raise this issue with the school principal and if necessary, at a later point with the Chairperson of the school Board of Management, who are the body which has responsibility for the management of the school.

The Guidelines for Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools, which are due to be published shortly will support schools in identifying and addressing the needs of children with special education needs and also in monitoring their deployment of resources to meet those needs.

The Guidelines have drawn on best practice to assist schools to allocate the greatest level of resources to the pupils with the highest levels of needs. The school self-evaluation process also supports schools to examine their own practices in the area of special education, to identify what is working well but also to identify areas that require improvement. Schools will set targets for improvement and implement agreed actions at a whole-school level. This process will enable schools to monitor their deployment of resources in area of special education needs.

In relation to oversight of in the way in which resource hours are used in schools, my Departments Inspectorate operates a programme of evaluation in primary and post-primary schools. The range of evaluation models available to the Inspectorate regularly involves inspectors evaluating, advising and reporting on the provision for pupils with SEN at the various levels of the Continuum of Support.

The Inspectorate also conducts SEN-specific evaluations at primary and at post-primary levels which allow for an in-depth focus on issues relating to special education needs. For example, in Evaluations of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs at primary level, one area of enquiry for the inspection team is the management and use of resources received to support pupils with special educational needs.

Question No. 343 answered with Question No. 341.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

344. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional provision has been made for special education needs co-ordination under the new resource allocation model, as recommended by his Department's inspectorate in relation to the review of the pilot; if schools are expected to provide this from within their resource allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13596/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

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 key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, who require such support.

It will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils in their school who require such support.

The review of the pilot project noted that the Programme for Partnership Government contains commitments to rebuild middle management capacity in schools and that SEN coordination needs to be considered within this context.

I wish to advise that Budget 2017 provides for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts in both the primary and post-primary sector. My Department in consultation with the Education Partners are carrying out a review of the post of responsibility structure in schools, in the context of restoration of posts, to address the further development of a distributed leadership model.

Circulars 0013/2017 0014/2017 also set out the position in relation to special educational needs coordination time.

The Circulars note that the allocations for special education teaching support include provi-

sion for the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs teaching hours provided to schools, for children. The effective use of resources will be dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensures continuity and avoids undue fragmentation of provision.

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of pupils requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers proving this support.

Schools are advised, however, that co-ordination time, should be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the most teaching time that can be provided for pupils can be given to those pupils.

Question No. 345 answered with Question No. 342.

Higher Education Institutions

346. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to increase the employer's contribution to higher education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13598/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and following a commitment in Budget 2017, I launched a public consultation process on 10 March 2017 on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training.

The proposed investment mechanism on which views are sought in the consultation process arises from a recommendation made in the 2016 report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education in order to more equitably reflect in funding terms the benefits derived by employers from the higher education sector. It is proposed to incrementally increase the National Training Fund levy by 0.1% each year between 2018-2020. It is estimated that should employment levels reach those forecast for 2020 together with an assumption of moderate growth in incomes, an increase in the levy from the current rate of 0.7% to 1% by 2020 could yield close to an additional €200 m.

While the consultation process is targeted in the first instance at key industry and employer stakeholders, comments are also invited from members of the public, groups and organisations. Comments may be submitted to the Departments of Education and Skills and Public Expenditure and Reform by 5 p.m. on Thursday 13th April 2017. Full details of the consultation process are available on the websites of both Departments.

Higher Education Institutions Staff

347. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the estimated costs of recruiting a retention officer for each higher education institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13599/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions including all of the universities and institutes of technology. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day-to-day affairs, including the allocation of all of its income (both public and private) and for the recruitment of staff such as retention officers.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

348. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the records that must be provided in order for special needs assistants to avail of incremental credit for previous relevant work experience; the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused incremental credit for one past employer, despite significant past experience; the reason the person has not yet had a decision on an appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13600/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The scheme for the award of incremental credit to Special Needs Assistants is agreed with the Unions representing Special Needs Assistants, School Management Authorities, The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department. The scheme is set out in Circular letter 139/2006.

In accordance with the criteria set out in the scheme for the Award of incremental credit, credit may be awarded on appointment to a qualified Special Needs Assistants post (once the applicants probationary period is completed) in respect of period(s) of suitable experience gained in the course of non-special needs assistants service, if among other things, that experience can be confirmed with the employers company records.

The application referred to by the Deputy was initially refused by my Department on the basis that the employing organisation was unable to confirm details of the applicants employment for the relevant period.

The applicant has submitted further information in support of her application which is now under consideration in my Department.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

349. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reasons a school (details supplied) was refused an application for funding under the summer works grant; if he will reconsider this decision; if his attention has been drawn to the issues in respect of overcrowding due to projected enrolment, as raised as an issue of concern by the inspectorate during a recent whole school evaluation; if he will make additional funds available to the school to rectify this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13601/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Category 6 application under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) in respect of a roof repairs project, from the school to which she refers, has not been refused.

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

context.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is not in receipt of a current application for capital funding from the school referred to. Any application received will be assessed in the context of current competing priorities and the need to prioritise available funding for essential classroom accommodation, where an additional teacher has been appointed.

School Enrolments

350. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 339 of 28 February 2017 (details supplied) whether it is expected that the likely provision can be made to facilitate a special class in any other school within a five-mile radius; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13606/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The enrolment of a child to a school 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 Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, published on 6th July 2016 and passed second stage on 17th November 2016, provides that where a school has places available it must admit all applicants. The Bill also contains a provision for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to designate a school for a child who has no school place for reasons related to the child's special educational needs, and for the Child and Family Agency to designate a school for a child who has no school place (other than a child with special educational needs). The NCSE or the Child and Family Agency will not be able to increase a school's capacity, a school must have places available for a designation to be made.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including establishing special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

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 has advised that they have met with the parents to assist in identifying school placements and that the child referred to by the Deputy has recently been offered a placement in a primary school in the area.

The NCSE also 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.

Children with autism may be eligible for home tuition if a school placement is not available

for them and/or where a determination is awaited in respect of an expulsion or refusal to enrol taken under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. Details in relation to the Home Tuition schemes are available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

Special Educational Needs Staff

351. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on contacts his Department has had with the board of management of a school (details supplied) that provides education facilities for children with special needs regarding the special needs assistants allocation of that school; if the school will be permitted to hire four more SNAs to cater for the needs of the children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13607/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates SNA support to schools, in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, in order that students who have special educational needs and additional care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

The purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs.

The scheme provides for the allocation of a quantum of SNA support to schools, taking into account the assessed care needs of individual children with disabilities, or severe medical needs. The scheme is not limited only to children who have been assessed as having specified categories of disability.

Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE.

At my request, the NCSE have commenced a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA) and in that context to:

- Identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and

- Recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The NCSE will report to me on the progress of this review in May 2017.

Officials in my Department are in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and a decision in respect of the appropriate levels of SNA supports for the school will be taken following a review by the NCSE of existing allocations and of students needs in the school.

Questions Nos. 352 and 353 answered with Question No. 264.

School Accommodation

354. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application to his Department by a school (details supplied) for an extension to include new

classrooms and a hall in view of the fact that the application has been with his Department for some time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13671/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The application to which the Deputy refers is currently being considered by my Department. My Department expects to be in further contact with the school authority in the matter shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

355. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when work on the new school buildings for a school (details supplied) will commence; the status of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13704/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process.

The school was authorised to issue a Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer on 14th March 2017. The completed supplementary tender report from the school and its design team will be submitted to my Department in the coming weeks and following its review and subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the third quarter of 2017. The project is scheduled to take 25 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

356. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the next phase of the school building for a school (details supplied) will commence; the status of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13705/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers was authorised to proceed to tender in October 2016.

The Design Team is currently finalising a shortlist of contractors who will be invited to tender for the project.

Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction could commence in the summer of 2017 and the project is scheduled to take approximately 18 months to complete.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

357. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reason funding was refused by the HSE to supply a nurse to a person (details supplied) who has been out of school since February 2017. [13712/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides funding for a range of Special Educational Supports in schools. These include Special Education Teachers and Special Needs Assistants.

My Department does not fund nursing provision in schools. Where nurses are funded in schools the funding is provided by the HSE and accordingly questions on funding for nursing provision in schools should be addressed to my colleague the Minister for Health.

Apprenticeship Programmes

358. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of colleges providing courses for apprentice mechanics; if all colleges charge the apprentices for courses provided or if there are different rates depending on the college; if his Department pays the colleges for any aspect of such courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13717/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Apprenticeship is a blended alternative training programme, with the off the job training element of apprentice mechanics courses delivered by Education and Training Board (ETB) training centres and Institutes of Technology (IoTs).

Students are not charged a fee for participating in phase 2 of apprentice mechanic courses, which are delivered in ETB training centres. Phase 4 and phase 6 of these mechanic courses are delivered by IoTs. The Annual Student Contribution (ASC) is levied on all students attending IoTs and the amount due by apprentices is calculated on a pro rata basis of the time which they spend in IoTs during the academic year. This is typically one third of the ASC paid by students attending for the full academic year and amounts to €1,000. SOLAS fund ETBs for phase 2 training and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) fund provision in the IoTs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

359. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the procedure that should be followed under the new resource allocation model when a child with special needs transfers to a new school; if the resource hours allocated to the child transfer with them to the new school or if an additional application is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13718/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

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 key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, 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's 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 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 schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. 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 schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile. This includes provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

The new allocations to schools will include provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

All allocations to schools include a supplementary provision, which has been referred to as the 'baseline allocation' which is allocated over and above the profiled allocation.

For students who start school from September 2017, with a specific diagnosis, either in junior infants or transferring from another school, the resources they need will already be in the school under the new model.

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 generally, a school's profile will 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. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website:*www.ncse.ie.* Should a school wish to appeal they should do so by March 31st 2017.

Schools will be able to appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools should read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relates to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The model will allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. 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.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

360. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if further schools will be added to the DEIS programme in the coming 12 months; the process and timeframe for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13727/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage are those which have not

been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification process, which is fair and objective.

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

361. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the re-evaluation of schools that had applied for DEIS status will be completed; if schools previously excluded from DEIS will now have an opportunity to be re-evaluated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13731/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to *social_inclusion@education.gov.ie.*

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

School Staff

362. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department's circular 0017/2017 concerning appointment of additional teachers in primary schools has any element of flexibility or appeal mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13736/17]

363. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if schools in which enrolment will increase in September 2017 but not by an additional 25 students compared to 2016 will be eligible to appoint an additional teacher; if he has considered the fact that the implication for the intake of schools at infant level will be greater than his Department's recommended class size; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13737/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 362 and 363 together.

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

Staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year are set out in circular 0017/2017 which is available on my Departments website.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The deployment of classroom teachers to individual classes is dealt with at individual school level. With over 21,100 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. The Department's guidance to

schools is to ensure that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible, taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). Schools are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

Given that the staffing schedule operates to a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils, if a school has a large class it generally also has a small class.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

364. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reason a primary school (details supplied) in County Mayo is deemed ineligible for urban and rural DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13738/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage, including the school 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 identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to *social_inclusion@education.gov.ie.*

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in

demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

365. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) can appeal allocated hours and receive more hours with regard to the new system of special educational needs support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13759/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of 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 have been 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.

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 key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, 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's 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 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 schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. 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 schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile. This includes provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

The new allocations to schools will include provision for junior infants who are newly enrolling to the school or pupils who may transfer from another school.

All allocations to schools include a supplementary provision, which has been referred to as the 'baseline allocation' which is allocated over and above the profiled allocation.

For students who start school from September 2017, with a specific diagnosis, either in junior infants or transferring from another school, the resources they need will already be in the school under the new model.

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 generally, a school's profile will 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. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: *www.ncse.ie.* Should a school wish to appeal they should do so by March 31st 2017.

Schools will be able to appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools should read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relates to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The model will allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. 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.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

School Accommodation

366. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for additional space made by a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when a decision will issue on this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13778/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation from the school referred to.

The application is currently being assessed and my Department will be in direct contact with the school authority concerned when the assessment process has concluded.

School Accommodation

367. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has a policy regarding the use of sports halls as classrooms in schools; if officials in the building unit have been advising principals to use the sports halls as classrooms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13782/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department only considers the use of Sports/PE halls or General Purpose rooms as classrooms where an immediate accommodation need arises to cater for increased enrolments or extra staffing and it is not possible to meet this need straight away. This approach may also be considered where the requirement for additional accommodation is a short-term necessity. For long-term needs, my Department makes funding available under its Additional Accommodation Scheme for permanent accommodation for a school.

The Deputy will appreciate that my Department's primary objective is to ensure that every child has access to a physical school place and that funding is prioritised for the provision of es-

sential classroom accommodation to meet demographic demand.

Teachers' Remuneration

368. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13788/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person referred to by the Deputy applied for recognition of previous EU teaching service under Circular 27/2016. She received payment including arrears for this service in the pay issue of 9th March, 2017.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

369. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the inclusion of a school (details supplied) for DEIS status, taking into account the socio-economic profile and marginal geographic location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13790/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

Schools which have not been included or upgraded at this stage, including the school 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 identification process, which is fair and objective.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to *social_inclusion@education.gov.ie.*

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more

accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Special Educational Needs Staff

370. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is still waiting to fill positions for special needs assistants despite the board of management attempting to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13804/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates SNA support to schools, in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, in order that students who have special educational needs and additional care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

The purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs.

The scheme provides for the allocation of a quantum of SNA support to schools, taking into account the assessed care needs of individual children with disabilities, or severe medical needs. The scheme is not limited only to children who have been assessed as having specified categories of disability.

Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE.

At my request, the NCSE have commenced a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA) and in that context to:

- Identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and

- Recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The NCSE will report to me on the progress of this review in May 2017.

Officials in my Department are in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and a decision in respect of the appropriate levels of SNA supports for the school will be taken following a review by the NCSE of existing allocations and of students needs in the school.

Schools Property

371. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the lengthy delay in coming to an agreement with a club and school (details supplied) on a land swap that will benefit the club, the school and the wider community. [13871/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are a number of legal and technical matters to be resolved pertaining to the proposal by the club referred to by the Deputy.

I can confirm that officials from my Department have consulted with the school authorities in relation to the proposal and the matter is being progressed.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

372. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the position of the DEIS programme in view of recent errors being discovered in the DEIS list. [13897/17]

373. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the recently-discovered error with the DEIS list was first discovered. [13898/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 372 and 373 together.

I take it that the Deputy is referring to the recent re-categorisation of 4 DEIS primary schools as between Urban and Rural.

At the outset, it is important to note that the categorisation of a school as between urban or rural is related to its geographical position and is not related to the assessed level of concentrated disadvantage of its pupil cohort.

The categorisation of schools included in the list announced on 13th February as between urban and rural was based on CSO Electoral Division Strata. However, in some cases these Electoral Divisions are very large and, in a small number of cases, make borderline decisions on a school's designation more difficult. While the schools involved were correctly designated in terms of the ED boundaries, closer consideration of their designation suggested certain anomalies in terms of their urban/rural categorisation and a requirement for further examination.

Following further examination and external technical advice, my Department has decided to use an alternative boundary classification known as "settlements" which better take into account growth in population and the expansion of urban areas over time. Settlements with a population of 1,500 or more are classified as urban, while those with a population of less than 1,500 are classified as rural. My Department is satisfied that this UN-recognised designation is the most appropriate method of categorising schools as between urban and rural.

As with all aspects of the new DEIS identification process, this aspect of school categorisation will be kept under review and updated as and when improved data becomes available.

I wish to assure the Deputy that all new schools included in the DEIS Programme on February 13th last have been examined in the context of this new classification criteria and the four schools affected have been contacted by my Department of the change required.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

374. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to make further revisions to the DEIS list. [13899/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

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 in 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. This includes 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 schools raised to Urban Band 1 status, 51 new Rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post Primary DEIS schools.

It is important to note that the school details published on 13th February represent a first step in the application of the assessment process to support pupils in schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

However, as noted in the DEIS Plan, 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 create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

In delivering on the DEIS Plan 2017 we must be conscious that there are ongoing changes in demographics which may be more marked in some areas than others. Populations in some areas have changed considerably since schools were originally evaluated for inclusion in DEIS in 2006. The new model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

375. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the revised methodology he is using to assess schools to enter the DEIS scheme; and the way it differs from the original methodology. [13900/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is the availability of a new identification process for the assessment of schools for inclusion in DEIS using centrally held CSO and DES data.

Two separate approaches were adopted in the 2005 process for the assessment of schools across the Primary and Post Primary sectors. At Primary level a survey of school Principals was used while at Post-Primary, a combination of data from the DES Post-Primary Pupils Database, including school-level retention rates, together with exam achievement data and exam fee waiver data, which indicated that students had a medical card, from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) was used. The objective of both methods was to capture the socio-economic variables that collectively best predict the risk of educational disadvantage.

The revised identification process for DEIS 2017 is significantly more robust. 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. Through the use of centrally held data, schools were not required to submit an application for inclusion in the programme.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

376. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the response to Parliamentary Question No. 18 of 1 March 2017 and indicate whether the research document referred to in that question was considered by his Department in producing the criteria upon which applications for DEIS would be evaluated (details supplied). [13905/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware from my reply of the 1st March of the key data sources considered and used in the new identification process. This is based on objective data sourced from the CSO and from the Department's POD and PPOD database, and not on research provided by schools or other bodies. Unlike previous rounds of DEIS allocation, this allocation on this occasion did not depend on applications from schools or information gathered by other bodies, but purely on objective data. As such, the research document referred to was not an input into the decision-making process. However, the Department is aware of the document and its findings.

Further information on the development of the new identification model is contained in the report of the DEIS Review Process 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-/DEIS-Review-Report.pdf.*

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

377. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of schools serving the 51 areas designated under the RAPID programme not designated as DEIS schools; and the name of those schools. [13906/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is the availability of a new identification process for the assessment of schools for inclusion in DEIS using centrally held CSO and DES data.

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. Through the use of centrally held data, schools were not required to submit an application for inclusion in the programme.

It is important to note that a school's rate of disadvantage is based on the student cohort attending the school, and not where the school itself is located. Accordingly, the RAPID designation was not considered to be an appropriate variable for the identification of schools for participation in DEIS.

The location of the 51 areas designated under the RAPID Programme can be found on the Pobal website at the following link: *https://www.pobal.ie/FAQ/Pages/RAPID.aspx.*

The list of all Post Primary schools in Ireland is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/Education-UT-primaryEducation-IE-DepartmentofEducationAndSkills-PrimarySchoolsLocations2016-2017-010317.csv.

The list of all Primary Schools in Ireland is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/Education-UT-primaryEducation-IE-DepartmentofEducationAndSkills-PrimarySchoolsLocations2016-2017-0103171.csv.

The list of DEIS schools for the 2016/2017 school year can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_school_list.xls.

Details of the new DEIS schools included in the list published on 13th February 2017 can also be found on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Plan-2017-New-DEIS-Schools-List.pdf.

Teachers' Remuneration

378. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills whether a person (details supplied) can continue to remain in position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13907/17]

381. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be permitted to remain teaching past their 65th birthday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13958/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 and 381 together.

The individual to whom the Deputy refers is a primary school teacher in a recognised primary school and is a member of the Primary School Teachers Pension Scheme 2009.

In accordance with the terms of that superannuation scheme it is not possible to remain in pensionable service beyond the end of the school year in which she reaches age 65. The person to whom the Deputy refers, would at that point, immediately qualify for pension and lump-sum based on the service she has accrued.

With reference to how the vacant post should be subsequently be filled, it is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012). My Department has set out in a number of circulars the detail as to how the sequence of recruitment for qualified teachers should be applied by schools. It is possible, subject to giving preference to unemployed teachers, that schools can recruit retired teachers to cover short term absences. In those circumstances where a teacher who is retired and is in receipt of a pension returns to teaching she will start on the first point of incremental salary scale as appropriate and her pension will be abated.

In addition the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published in August 2016 a report from the Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives. That Department, together with Public Service employers, is now reviewing the statutory and operational barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

379. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 217 of 29 November 2016, when a response will issue from the NCSE (details supplied). [13913/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including SNA support. As the question previously raised by the Deputy related to an application for SNA support for an individual child, I arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

The NCSE has informed my Department that there is insufficient evidence in the professional report submitted with the application of significant care needs. The NCSE has confirmed that they will reply directly to the Deputy with regards to the application.

School Staff

380. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will not be a reduction in the number of teachers allocated to a school (details supplied). [13954/17]

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.

Staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year are set out in circular 0017/2017 which is available on my Departments website.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 501 on 30th September 2016. This allows for a mainstream staffing of 18 classroom teachers for the 2017/18 school year.

Question No. 381 answered with Question No. 378.

Teaching Contracts

382. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reasons teachers employed on a full-time basis for two years or more under a fixed-term contract fulfilling a job share post are not eligible to apply for a contract of indefinite duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13963/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department issued Circulars 23/2015 and 24/2015 on the 27th March 2015, on foot of the report presented by Peter Ward SC. These Circulars set out the detailed arrangements and procedures for the implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Primary and Second Level Education in Ireland which was chaired by Mr. Ward.

In line with the recommendations of the Ward Report those Circulars outlined that teachers covering for job share posts were not covering for an approved leave of absence and therefore do not qualify to be considered for the award of a Contract of Indefinite Duration.

Special Educational Needs Staff

383. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) can be provided with an additional four special needs assistants to make up the allocated numbers to alleviate the workload of the 14 SNAs currently in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13980/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates SNA support to schools, in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, in order that students who have special educational needs and additional care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

The purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide schools with additional adult support staff

who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs.

The scheme provides for the allocation of a quantum of SNA support to schools, taking into account the assessed care needs of individual children with disabilities, or severe medical needs. The scheme is not limited only to children who have been assessed as having specified categories of disability.

Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE.

At my request, the NCSE have commenced a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA) and in that context to:

- Identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and

- Recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The NCSE will report to me on the progress of this review in May 2017.

Officials in my Department are in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and a decision in respect of the appropriate levels of SNA supports for the school will be taken following a review by the NCSE of existing allocations and of students needs in the school.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

384. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the precise criteria used by his Department to evaluate the DEIS supports to be made available to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13982/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS Plan for 2017 sets out our vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is the availability of a new identification process for the assessment of schools for inclusion in DEIS using centrally held CSO and DES data.

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. Schools were not required to submit an application for inclusion in the programme as the centrally held data required was already held by my Department.

Further information on the development of the identification process 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-/.

Special Educational Needs Staff

385. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all autism spectrum disorder units at primary level will employ a special education teacher to ensure that the appropriate skills are available in these units; the number of special education teachers that are currently employed by his Department at primary level; the policy on the employment of special education teachers at primary level; his views on whether the need to have special education teachers available in all primary schools is a vital element in the education of all students with special needs attending mainstream school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14047/17]

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 require 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 ASD Units, 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.

Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training. The funding includes:

- Over 12,500 Learning Support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2016/2017 school year, providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs.

- Over 1,100 teachers in 125 special schools.

- Over 1,150 special classes (1,150 teacher posts) in place with 150 new Special Classes opening for the 2016/17 school year. This compares to 548 special classes in 2011.

A new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools has been introduced and will commence in schools from September

2017.

An additional 900 teaching posts have been provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model. This substantial additional provision will ensure that:

- Up to 1,000 schools will receive additional allocations, where the new model indicates additional need.

- No school will receive an allocation of resources less than the allocation they received in the 2016/17 school year.

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 schools.

The revised allocations, based on the profiled special education needs of schools issued to schools on 7th March 2017.

A new Circular for Schools issued recently in conjunction with notifications to schools of their allocation for 2017/18, which was issued by NCSE.

Public Sector Staff

386. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down in tabular form the number of employees across his Department and each agency or organisation under the aegis of his Department who are suspended from work without prejudice and on full pay pending an investigation; and if he will provide, in the case of there being one or more employee in this situation, details with regards to the suspensions (details supplied). [14064/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are no employees from my Department or from bodies under the aegis of my Department currently suspended from work without prejudice and on full pay pending investigation.

Departmental Legal Costs

387. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, who provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14130/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The amounts spent by my department on legal advice for each year since 2015 are as follows:

2015

Conor Feeney, Barrister at Law Junior Counsel €13,591.50

2016

Conor Feeney, Barrister at Law Junior Counsel €16,236

McCann Fitzgerald, Solicitors €1,476

2017

Aoife Carroll, Barrister at Law Junior Counsel €1,230.

Question No. 388 answered with Question No. 241.

School Discipline

389. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his views on policies on the appropriate usage, utilisation and measure of forced absence sanctions or punishments, suspensions and expulsions at second level school. [14200/17]

390. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the relevant departmental sections and State agencies charged with overseeing and managing the employment and implementation of forced absence punishments or sanctions, suspensions and expulsions at second level as well as those charged with examining and correcting any evident overuse at individual school level. [14201/17]

391. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine summary information concerning forced absence sanction or punishments at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14202/17]

392. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to indicate the inquiries and investigations he will initiate further to summary information concerning forced absence sanction and punishments at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14206/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 389 to 392, inclusive, together.

The Education Welfare Act 2000 requires all schools to have in a place a Code of Behaviour. The Act requires that a school Code of Behaviour shall, inter alia, specify the standards of behaviour that shall be observed by each student attending the school, the measures that may be taken when a student fails or refuses to observe those standards, the procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school concerned and the grounds for removing a suspension imposed in relation to a student.

The Act also requires that the Code must be prepared in accordance with guidelines issued by the Educational Welfare Service (formerly the National Educational Welfare Board). The EWS publication "Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools" was issued to schools in 2008 and includes guidance on the legal and procedural requirements governing suspension and expulsions as well as the features of good educational practice in the use of these sanctions.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Education Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Department's website or by contacting the Section 29 Administration Unit at 0761 108584 or by emailing section29@education.gov.ie.

Schools are not required to report the number of suspensions or expulsions made to my Department.

As the Deputy may be aware, TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency is the statutory body with responsibility for the administration of educational welfare functions contained in the Education Welfare Act, 2000. These include assisting parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child, and ensuring school attendance, participation and retention for all pupils. TUSLA operates under the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

TUSLA collect data from schools directly on school attendance. Schools are also obliged to notify the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA of absences of more than 20 days and suspensions of more than 6 days. Schools must also notify the EWS when they intend to expel a student from a school. My Department understands that where the EWS note excessive numbers of expulsions or suspensions the EWS can write to the Schools Board of Management to offer support to them to look at approaches that could enable them to reduce these numbers.

School Staff

393. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will not lose a teacher for the year 2017-2018; if this school will retain its existing allocation of teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14208/17]

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.

Staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year are set out in circular 0017/2017 which is available on my Departments website.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 501 on 30th September 2016. This allows for a mainstream staffing of 18 classroom teachers for the 2017/18 school year.

School Enrolments

394. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a request for additional funding (details supplied) will be given urgent consideration in view of the fact the present reduced allocation for 2017 is not adequate to meet ongoing financial commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14209/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand the Deputy is referring to the non-pay allocation within the entity. With regard to the current year funding (2017) and the non-pay allocation for the entity in question this has been calculated taking into account student enrolment numbers and head office costs. The 2017 initial allocation is higher than the initial 2016 allocation by over €150,000. As enrolments in the entity in question have remained static, the overall grant has reduced slightly on the 2012 levels.

The Deputy might wish to note that the improvements in the economy have now started to result in some improvements in the funding levels for the sector of which this entity is a part. The first steps in this regard was additional funding that was provided to this sector in 2015 and 2016; the entity in question received additional funding in the amount of €443,000 towards the end of 2016.

Any further improvements for the sector will be considered as part of the annual budgetary process.

Ministerial Allowances

395. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14565/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's records do not contain any overnight claims for staying in Dublin submitted by Ministers or Ministers of State since 2011.

Wind Energy Guidelines

396. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to the ongoing review of the wind farm planning guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13411/17]

397. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he will publish the new setback distances for wind turbines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13455/17]

398. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the actions he will take to assist persons affected by shorter setback distances from wind turbines on existing developments when the new, more substantial setback distances are published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13456/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 396 to 398, inclusive, together.

In December 2013, my Department published proposed draft revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- the setting of a more stringent day and night-time noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,

- a mandatory minimum setback distance of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and

- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was also initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the

2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, which ran until February 2014. The Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

In light of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to finalise the Guidelines and on-going policy and legal developments in this area, my Department is continuing to advance work on 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.

Property Tax Administration

399. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the percentage of property tax that is retained by each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13497/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local retention of Local Property Tax (LPT) commenced in 2015. Given that local authorities vary significantly from one another in terms of size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, the Government decided that 80% of the estimated LPT yield for a given year's liability is retained locally to fund public services, notwithstanding any local variation decisions. The remaining 20% of LPT is re-distributed to provide top-up or equalisation funding to certain local authorities that have lower property tax bases due to the variance in property values and density across the State.

Equalisation in the context of LPT allocations is a process that ensures that every local authority's LPT allocation is brought up to minimum funding level known as the LPT Baseline. The authority itself may subsequently decide to reduce its LPT rate locally in line with the power available to local authorities to vary the basic rate of LPT in their respective areas by up to 15%. In such circumstances, the LPT allocation is reduced in line with that decision and the corresponding income is foregone. In the event that a local authority decides to increase the LPT rate by up to 15%, the Government has decided that the local authority retains 100% of the additional LPT collected.

Question No. 400 withdrawn.

Housing for People with Disabilities Provision

401. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of adapted units that will be allocated to housing persons during phase 2 and phase 3 respectively of a development (details supplied); the estimated time of completion of both phases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12805/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the Part V agreement for this development, 124 units are being delivered for social housing. Of these 124 units, 6 units, comprising two one-bed and 4 two bed apartments, are being adapted to include level access showers.

Phase 1 consisted of 52 units, which were delivered in February 2017; Phase 2 includes 40 units and will be delivered shortly. Phase 3 includes 32 units and is expected to be delivered in

April 2017. All the adapted units will be provided in phase 3 of the development.

Water Meters

402. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authorities that had a water metering policy for new house builds prior to the establishment of Irish Water; the number of water meters installed by local authorities during that period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12832/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question No. 403 on today's Order Paper, which sets out the position in respect of attaching the condition of installation of a water meter to the planning permission for new houses.

Where a local authority decided to attach the condition of installation of a water meter to the planning permission for new houses this would have been at the sole discretion of the local authority in question.

Irish Water published a Code of Practice for Water Infrastructure (A design and construction guide for developers) in December 2016. The Code of Practice outlines acceptable typical design and construction guidance that is required by Irish Water for the provision of water supply pipes and related infrastructure which are to be connected to the Irish Water Network. It provides for general minimum requirements to apply to works in new developments including that all domestic connections shall have individually valve controlled metered services.

Prior to the commencement of the national metering programme, a survey was undertaken by local authorities which provided information on the number of meter boxes and meters which were in place at that time. Essentially, this survey identified properties that were suitable for metering and water meters were installed in line with the survey results as carried out by each Local Authority. Where water meters and meter boxes were installed in advance of the metering programme as a condition of planning, I understand that in some cases the planning authority only requested a meter box be installed, while in other cases the installation of a meter box and meter was required. Irish Water committed to reusing previously installed meter boxes where possible and over the course of the metering programme in excess of 125,000 meter boxes were reused by Irish Water.

Planning Issues

403. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if prior to the establishment of Irish Water, as part of the approval of a planning application for a new house build by a local authority, a water meter had to be installed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12833/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): When making decisions on planning applications or appeals, a planning authority or An Bórd Pleanála, as the case may be, is restricted to considering matters relating to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, as set out in section 34 the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

With regard to other matters, such as water meters, the 2007 Development Management Guidelines state that it is inappropriate for planning authorities to attach to planning permis-

sions conditions relating to matters that are subject to control under other legislation or regulation, unless there are particular circumstances, for example, the matters are relevant to proper planning and sustainable development and there is good reason to believe they cannot be dealt with effectively by other means. Instead, the Guidelines suggest that a planning authority could, when notifying the grant of a permission, issue clear notice about the requirements of other codes.

The 2007 Guidelines were issued under section 28 of the 2000 Act and planning authorities and the Board are required to have regard to them in the performance of their functions under the Act.

Building Control Management System

404. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of valid commencement notices lodged with the building control management software since 1 March 2014, by each local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12858/17]

405. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of valid commencement notices which included a completed optout declaration lodged with the building control management software since 1 September 2015, by local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12861/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 404 and 405 together.

The purpose of the Building Control Management System (BCMS) is to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their separate responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990. The system provides a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector.

My Department is not involved in the day to day operation of this system. However, it collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics, including information on Commencement Notices, which are available on the Department's website at *http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts*.

In addition, Building Control Authorities are required to keep certain information pertaining to building works that come under the Building Control Regulations 1997-2015 on a statutory register, including particulars in relation to Commencement Notices and Declarations of Intention to Opt Out of Statutory Certification. BCMS is centrally hosted by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the 31 Local Authorities and has enabled this information to be hosted on a central nationwide register, readily available and updated quarterly at *https://www.localgov.ie/en/link-type/bcms*.

Irish Water Remit

406. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department is providing funding to Dublin City Council for the north city arterial watermain as part of the S2S footway and cycleway interim works scheme at Clontarf, Dublin 3; the level of funding being provided; if difficulties have been notified to his De-

partment in relation to these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12891/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to *oireachtasmembers@water.ie* or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Grant Payments

407. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there are grants available for the removal of asbestos roofs from community centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12927/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is no funding programme managed by my Department granting assistance to remove asbestos from community buildings.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

408. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to commence the national differential rents framework provided for in section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009; his plans to exclude family income supplement and disability payments for local authority rent assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12985/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The making and amending of rent schemes is the responsibility of local authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions, subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002 of 6 March 2002. It is a matter for local authorities, when assessing individual households, to consider whether rents payable are in accordance with the authority's rent scheme. Therefore, decisions on whether or not to disregard either a proportion of income or particular sources of income, such as Family Income Supplement (FIS), for the purposes of calculating rents are matters for each individual local authority in accordance with their own rent scheme.

Section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 allows the Minister to make regulations in respect of various matters to be included in a rent scheme, including the sources of household income that may be assessed for the purpose of determining rent levels. Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft framework for a harmonisation of the approach to be taken by local authorities in regard to various aspects of rent schemes. This includes providing for a common set of income disregards to be applied by all housing authorities in determining a household's assessable income for rent calculation purposes. These proposals are now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rents for social housing in place across local authorities to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or to the private housing market.

I expect this review to be completed before the end of Quarter 2 2017.

Commercial Rates Yield

409. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether local authorities have become significantly more reliant on revenues from commercial rates in view of the fact that revenues sourced from this category constituted 29% of total revenues in 2010 but in 2015 constituted 38%of total revenue; his further views on whether local authorities should diversify their revenue income sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12991/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The monetary amount of each revenue income source to local authorities in the years 2010 - 2015 is set out in Table 1. Table 2 sets out each revenue income source as a proportion of the total for the same period.

Table 1.

Revenue Income sources	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Goods & Services	€1.52bn	€1.482bn	€1.352bn	€1.38bn	€1.394bn	€1.304bn
Commercial rates	€1.43bn	€1.449bn	€1.497bn	€1.494bn	€1.5bn	€1.496bn
Income from local sources	€2.95bn	€2.931bn	€2.849bn	€2.874bn	€2.894bn	€2.8bn
Grants & subsidies	€1.225bn	€1.195bn	€939m	€850m	€871m	€878m
Other income*	€923m	€865m	€791m	€794m	€355m	€386m
Income from external sources	€2.148bn	€2.06bn	€1.73bn	€1.644bn	€1.226bn	€1.264bn
Total Income	€5.098bn	€4.991bn	€4.579bn	€4.518bn	€4.12bn	€4.064bn

Table 2.

Revenue Income sources	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Goods & Services	30%	30%	30%	31%	34%	32%
Commercial rates	28%	29%	33%	33%	36%	37%
Income from local sources	58%	59%	63%	64%	70%	69%

Revenue Income sources	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Grants & subsidies	24%	24%	20%	19%	21%	22%
Other income*	18%	17%	17%	17%	9%	9%

* Other income includes: the General Purpose Grants (GPG) which were paid to local authorities until 2014; Local Property Tax (LPT) allocations which commenced in 2015, replacing GPGs; the County Charge which ceased in 2014 when local authorities and the former town councils merged; and Pension Related Deductions which local authorities retained as income from 2009 to 2015.

While income from commercial rates has made up an increased proportion of local authorities' income, it has not increased significantly in monetary terms from 2010 to 2015. It is important to note that the local authority funding model changed considerably as a result of the introduction of LPT in 2013 and the establishment of Irish Water. The Local Government Fund (LGF) historically, through GPG allocations, provided local authorities with finance for funding some of their day-to-day activities, including elements of water services costs; for non-national roads; and funding for certain local government initiatives.

The Government decided in the context of Budget 2014 that the former water-related elements of GPGs should continue to contribute to the water services costs that were previously met by local authorities. GPG allocations from the LGF to local authorities in 2013 were €641m and in 2014 were €281.25m. These figures recognise the removal of water related costs from local authorities to Irish Water in 2014 and local authority allocations are therefore not directly comparable to previous years. In 2015, LPT allocations (which replaced GPGs) to local authorities amounted to €458.8m.

LPT was introduced to provide an alternative, stable and sustainable funding base for the local authority sector, providing greater levels of connection between local revenue raising and associated expenditure decisions and giving greater funding certainty for the sector through removing the reliance on other taxes, which may fluctuate according to economic circumstances. It is a matter for each local authority to decide as to how it can maximise local income sources and manage its own spending, in the context of the annual budgetary process.

Section 20 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 provides local authority members with the power to vary the rates of LPT in their areas from 2015 onwards by up to 15%. If an authority decides to vary the LPT basic rate upwards (by up to 15%) it retains 100% of the resultant additional income collected in that area. Likewise, if the rate is reduced, the authority forgoes the full amount of the reduced income collected. Fewer local authorities decided to lower their LPT rates for 2017 than was the case for 2016, illustrating a growing appreciation of the link between service provision, LPT income and the budgetary process. Limerick, Wexford and Galway County became the first local authorities to use their power to vary the LPT rate upwards for 2017, thereby gaining a combined €3.6m in additional LPT income for the delivery of local services in their areas.

Housing Provision

410. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has analysed the optimum mix of social and private housing

dwellings in large scale developments such as strategic development zones in terms of social cohesion, the tipping point for private buyers to purchase in such schemes, the average income levels sufficient to attract retail and other pull services; if his attention has been drawn to international evidence in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13020/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, will apply to each individual application or applications for permission for housing in a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ), or any other large development, which should lead to 10% social housing in the development in question.

The acquisition of further social housing units, beyond the Part V requirement, in an SDZ or other development is a matter for the relevant housing authority in the first instance, subject to the policy of sustainable communities, which aims to ensure the provision of a choice of house type, size and tenure within a single neighbourhood.

The objective of this policy is to avoid the significant effects of social isolation and limiting of opportunities that can occur with large mono - tenure estates, frequently necessitating significant regeneration and remediation proposals at a later stage, at considerable cost. This policy approach was reaffirmed in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 published in November 2014 which further defined sustainable neighbourhoods as "areas where an efficient use of land, high quality urban design and effective integration in the provision of physical and social infrastructure such as public transport, schools, amenities and other facilities combine to create places people want to live".

My Department has produced considerable planning guidance, including Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2010) and the Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2013), to assist local authorities to promote sustainable communities. In addition, the Department guidance document, Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities, seeks to promote quality and value for money in publicly funded housing.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

411. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to review the 10% social mix in housing developments provided for under current legislation; his plans to facilitate ancillary schemes such as shared ownership as an additional option (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13021/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 made a number of amendments to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, effective from 1 September 2015, following the outcome of an independent review of Part V, which included a consultation process.

The amendments sought to maximise the contribution Part V can make to social housing supply and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country. The amendments reduced the overall requirement for social and affordable housing in private developments from 20% to 10% of the total, but also removed the option of a cash payment by the developer in lieu of units, or the transfer of sites or parts of sites. The options remaining are focused on the delivery of completed units. The operation of Part V is kept under review by my Department.

I have currently no plans to re-introduce a Shared Ownership Scheme. However, a range of measures are being taken under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homeless-

ness to increase housing supply overall, with the aim of creating a functioning and sustainable housing system which can meet housing demand at more affordable prices.

The plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system. Pillar 3, entitled Build More Homes, has a key objective of increasing the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices, including by

- Opening up land supply and State lands, including the Major Urban Housing Development Sites initiative, which identified large-scale sites in the main cities that are capable of delivering significant homes in the short to medium term to boost overall housing supply;

- €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund;

- National Treasury Management Agency financing of large-scale "on-site" infrastructure;

- Planning Reforms;

- Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions;

- Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs;

- Measures to support construction innovation and skills.

Pillar 4 of the Plan, entitled Improve the Rental Sector, provided for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is now being progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones.

Other measures taken to increase the supply of housing include -

- The enhanced supply of more affordable starter homes in key locations through a targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels;

- New National Apartment Planning Guidelines, reducing the cost of apartment building;

- Changes to aspects of the operation of Strategic Development Zones to enable swifter adjustments to meet market requirements;

- A vacant sites levy.

In relation to assistance to purchase, the Help to Buy incentive is designed to assist first-time buyers with obtaining the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new home. The incentive provides for a refund of Income Tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) paid over the previous four tax years to first-time buyers. Further information on this Scheme can be found on the Revenue Commissioners' website at the following link: http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/reliefs/htb/index.html.

It might also be noted that a first time buyer who is unable to get a loan from a building society or bank may be eligible for a mortgage from their local authority, in cases where the gross income (before tax) is €50,000 or less for a single income household or €75,000 or less in the case of a double income household. The loan can be up to 97% of the price of the house subject to a maximum loan of €200,000. Also first time buyers can apply for a Home Choice Loan to purchase a new or second hand property or build their own home. Home Choice Loan provides up to 92% of the market value of a property purchased, subject to a maximum loan amount of

€285,000. Further information is available at www.homechoiceloan.ie.

Building Control Management System

412. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of on site inspections carried out by local authorities on construction projects entered onto the building control management software since 1 March 2014 that were deemed to be covered by valid commencement notices, by each local authority area, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13059/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The matters referred to are matters for local authorities, who are independent in the use of their statutory powers under the Building Control Acts 1990 - 2014.

Regarding the number of inspections carried out, the Local Government Management Agency collected data on inspections carried out up to 2013 and published this information in the Service Indicators in Local Authorities reports from 2005 to 2013. These reports are available at http://www.lgma.ie/en/publication-category/service-indicator-reports-2004-2010.

Following the commencement of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) now collects and publishes this data. The Performance Indicators in Local Authorities reports for 2014 & 2015 are available at http://noac.ie/noac-reports/. The 2016 report will be published by NOAC once it is finalised.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

413. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 355 of 28 February 2017, if he will consider further amending the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to allow for towns with a population of over 5,000 persons to be considered for designation as rent pressure zones in their own right, rather than the present system whereby the whole local electoral area is looked at (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13120/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have undertaken to carry out a review, in June this year, of the Rent Predictability provisions introduced under the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016. At that point, the provisions will have been in place for 6 months and it will be possible to ascertain their effectiveness and whether any changes need to be made to, for example, the qualifying criteria or the designation process. The issues the Deputy raises will be considered at that stage.

Housing Provision

414. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of potential development sites in each local authority that are publicly owned or controlled; the total area in hectares of these sites; the potential number of bed spaces or housing units that could be constructed on these sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13122/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, which is available at *http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf*, contains a number of integrated actions to underpin active land supply management for the delivery of housing. In particular, Action 3.5 commits to the establishment of a centralised database of publicly-owned lands, that are potentially suitable for the development of housing, whether by the State or by private sector housing providers, and that could be brought forward to aid land, and therefore housing, supply.

Initially, this involves identifying and mapping sites in local authority and public ownership with appropriate lands to be master-planned to deliver increased mixed-tenure housing, including social and more affordable homes, to meet demand. The map will form part of the broader National Land Supply Management Strategy, which is being developed within the context of the Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework. Once established, the map will be updated to record the development and use of these lands, to ensure that the best possible information is publicly available. The project is an iterative process and will be completed in phases.

Phase 1 of the mapping project is well underway and involves the mapping of approximately 700 sites in local authority ownership and those held by the Housing Agency under the Land Aggregation Scheme, showing their location, size, boundaries and other information. I expect to be in a position to publish this mapped data set, together with lands zoned for residential development, in the coming weeks.

Phase 2 of the project involves the mapping of other publicly-owned and religious congregation-owned sites with housing potential. In this regard, my Department is working with the relevant Government Departments, State Agencies and semi-State bodies to identify all potentially suitable sites. The initial focus of this phase of the project will be on lands in the main urban areas where demand is highest, i.e. Dublin, and the cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

A third phase of the project will involve the mapping of local authority and Approved Housing Body social housing construction projects. This will include new build projects under the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme, the Capital Assistance Scheme, as well as regeneration, rapid delivery, turnkey (i.e. pre-construction acquisition), design and build, and Part V projects.

Already, local authorities and approved housing bodies have a strong pipeline of construction projects in place that will deliver 8,430 social housing homes. In February, I published a full list of social housing construction projects, in each local authority area, in the Social Housing Construction Status Report for Q4 2016 which can be accessed here:*http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Social-Housing_Construction-Status-Report_Q4-2016.pdf*.

I am keen that all approved projects are advanced as quickly as possible and I have assured the local authorities that funding is available for well-planned, quality projects, to fully support their efforts in this regard.

At its heart, Rebuilding Ireland is about increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures, to help individuals and families find homes. The active pursuit of housing provision on State lands, including local authority lands, will continue to be an important part of delivering on this overall ambition.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

415. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the rules and flexibility applying to the tenant purchase scheme in relation to the amount that can be paid by way of a lump sum in conjunction with the portion that is liable by way of mortgage; the length of time a member of a household must be named on the tenancy before their income can be taken into account in the purchase of the house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13123/17]

440. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when is it likely to have a new revised tenant purchase scheme in place that takes into account savings that persons that are retired might have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13384/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 415 and 440 together.

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, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The funding of the purchase price is a separate matter from the reckonable income criteria for the scheme. In relation to funding of the purchase price, a tenant may fund the purchase from one, or a combination of, his or her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

Under Part 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 the tenant, or in the case of joint tenants, one of the tenants must have been in receipt of social housing support for a minimum period of one year on the date of making the application to purchase. A housing authority shall not sell a house to a tenant where, in the three years prior to applying to purchase, he or she or a household member was in arrears of rent, rent contributions, charges, fees or any other monies owing to a housing authority for an accumulated period of more than 12 weeks in respect of a dwelling or site provided as social housing support. Under the legislation there is no provision given for a specified length of time required to be a joint tenant for purposes of a tenant purchase application.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, and reaffirmed in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of operation of the scheme is currently being conducted by my Department. To inform the review a public consultation was undertaken during January/February of this year. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that time will be brought forward.

I expect the review to be completed in the coming weeks.

Derelict Sites

416. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will request that empty houses in County Kildare owned by Waterways Ireland will be either taken out of dereliction or given to the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13126/17]

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

Coveney): The Derelict Sites Act 1990 requires every owner and occupier of land, including a statutory body and a State authority, to take all reasonable steps to ensure that land does not become or does not continue to be a derelict site. It also requires that local authorities take reasonable steps, including the exercise of appropriate statutory powers, to ensure that any land within their functional area does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. To this end, local authorities have been given substantial powers under the Act in relation to such sites, including to:

- establish and maintain a register of derelict sites in their functional area,
- require specified measures to be taken in relation to a derelict site,
- impose a levy on sites which are included in their derelict sites register, and
- acquire derelict sites by agreement or compulsorily.

I am informed that Kildare County Council does not have property owned by Waterways Ireland included in its Derelict Sites Register. Accordingly, the utilisation of powers under the Act, including Ministerial powers, does not arise.

It is a matter for local authorities to determine the most appropriate use of the legislation within their respective functional areas.

Under section 8(5) of the Act, a copy of the Derelict Sites Register compiled by a local authority can be inspected at the offices of the authority in question during office hours. This facilitates members of the public to engage, if they so wish, with their local authority in relation to addressing individual derelict sites.

Housing Assistance Payments Expenditure

417. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost of the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme in County Kildare in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13127/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. At 31 December 2016, there were 16,493 households having their housing need met through the HAP scheme. The provisional Exchequer outturn for the HAP scheme in 2016 was in excess of €57 million. The majority of this funding is to support the on-going costs of tenancies established in 2015 that continued into 2016, and the costs of the 12,075 additional households supported by the scheme in 2016.

A breakdown of the cost of supporting HAP tenancies by local authority, including Kildare County Council, is being compiled and will be available on my Department's website at *www.housing.gov.ie.*

Budget 2017 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €152.7 million, in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of supporting an additional 15,000 households to be supported by HAP in 2017.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

418. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons on the housing lists for County Kildare in each of the years from 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13128/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area are provided by the results of the tri-annual social housing needs assessments carried out from 1993 to 2011 under Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988, and the summaries of social housing assessments carried out in 2013 and 2016 in accordance with section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

The 2013 and 2016 results show that there were 5,454 and 5,572 households on Kildare County Council's waiting list as at 7 May 2013 and 21 September 2016, respectively.

The results of the summaries/assessments undertaken are available on my Department's website at the link below:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/sub-topic/needs-assessment.

It is important to note that only the results of the 2013 and 2016 summaries are directly comparable with each other. These summaries were carried out using a standardised methodology as specified by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. Previous summaries were not carried out under the current standardised assessment regime for social housing support which came into effect on 1 April 2011.

In line with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 future summaries will now be carried out an annual basis. I expect the results of the 2017 summary to be available for publication in the latter half of this year.

Community Enterprise Centres

419. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when a project (details supplied) under the Limerick regeneration programme can proceed to construction now that the tender phase has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13132/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Limerick City and County Council recently provided my Department with the tender report for the Moyross Community Enterprise Centre. This is now being examined and a response will issue to the Council shortly.

Housing Assistance Payments

420. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is the position regarding a tenant that is being moved to the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme but wishes to remain on the social housing list for a home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13135/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's long-term approach is for Rent Supplement to be replaced with the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) for households with a long-term housing need, although Rent Supplement will continue to be available for people who need short-term support

in meeting their housing costs.

Upon commencement of the 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. Under Rebuilding Ireland, it is envisaged that all long-term Rent Supplement recipients will be transferred to the HAP scheme by 2020.

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. 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.

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 were issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP tenants 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 December 2016, 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.*

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

421. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has undertaken an analysis of the costs of operating the commercial rates system; the estimated cost of centralising the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13142/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority, as are the costs of collection.

The Debt Management Project Implementation Board, on which my Department was represented, was established by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in February 2015, to progress the recommendations of the Debt Management Review, which was published in 2014. The Project Implementation Board concluded its work in 2016 and recommended that a Central Collection Agency was not justified at this time. This was due to the fact that the improvements which had been made by the Public Sector Bodies (PSBs) and the targets set for those PSBs for the period to 2018 were close to those that might be expected of a Central Collection Agency.

As part of this process, the local authority Sector prepared a business case for stronger enforcement powers in the collection of commercial rates. This business case was endorsed by the Project Board. I will be bringing legislative proposals to Government shortly in this regard.

Local Authority Housing Funding

422. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the annual support from his Department to each local authority to the housing capital programme in each of the years 2000 to 2016, in tabular form. [13143/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information sought in respect of funding provided to local authorities under the main social housing delivery programmes is set out in the table. The data for 2015 and 2016 includes amounts self-funded by certain local authorities from surplus Local Property Tax receipts.

In addition, my Department also funds a range of other capital programmes in relation to regeneration and stock improvement and the delivery of specific housing solutions such as Traveller accommodation and supports for older people and people with a disability.

As my Department's current financial management system was implemented in 2004, the information sought prior to that date is not readily available and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

Local Authority	2016 €million	2015 €million	2014 €million	2013 €million	2012 €million	2011 €million	2010 €million	2009 €million	2008 €million	2007 €million	2006 €million	2005 €million	2004 €million
Carlow	4.82	2.35	2.89	3.22	3.45	2.93	5.03	9.43	23.25	13.73	18.39	20.14	10.06
Cavan	2.84	2.23	1.61	2.33	2.03	1.24	4.98	11.63	14.38	11.06	5.58	14.17	13.60
Clare	4.13	4.23	3.81	4.25	1.88	4.40	7.36	17.75	26.12	17.09	18.24	11.35	17.72
Cork City	20.97	22.06	2.19	2.06	3.09	2.09	27.16	64.21	81.01	66.28	99.62	60.09	52.84
Cork County Council	22.04	9.92	2.91	5.46	9.29	18.09	46.51	77.18	75.98	76.22	54.53	57.69	32.19
DL Rathdown	13.99	16.20	2.78	5.16	20.38	5.00	34.96	38.93	32.91	20.74	31.59	14.37	17.63
Donegal	2.87	2.13	4.05	2.14	2.77	6.26	13.31	27.61	45.77	35.70	47.96	40.90	29.15
Dublin City	75.71	43.25	35.16	27.85	20.29	25.90	69.10	84.64	175.82	137.10	130.70	79.24	108.90
Fingal	15.64	37.07	11.33	7.96	9.78	17.74	31.48	20.56	34.11	25.08	36.26	33.23	29.94
Galway City	0.61	4.15	1.19	1.31	6.57	8.96	12.73	18.13	28.01	30.93	19.08	10.40	6.50
Galway County Council	4.43	1.44	3.79	3.12	2.71	4.09	8.02	14.37	25.48	26.83	25.78	12.22	13.06
Kerry	4.78	4.53	1.25	1.42	1.55	5.19	19.16	22.67	37.67	37.29	25.93	32.41	23.24
Kildare	23.40	13.95	4.71	5.44	7.02	26.79	21.72	35.04	55.18	43.78	38.80	37.27	18.00
Kilkenny	8.47	6.62	1.59	3.04	7.12	5.29	12.73	16.29	28.55	29.77	24.35	15.59	12.95
Laois	3.87	4.66	3.97	0.75	2.31	5.01	8.39	9.70	21.12	24.49	22.91	32.41	21.75
Leitrim	1.46	0.36	0.53	1.18	0.53	0.14	2.76	5.11	4.55	2.88	3.98	4.37	5.56
Limerick (unified)	4.64	0.80	2.07	4.90	7.30	9.12	20.75	44.83	37.99	31.83	24.13	25.37	27.00

Local Authority	2016 €million	2015 €million	2014 €million	2013 €million	2012 €million	2011 €million	2010 €million	2009 €million	2008 €million	2007 €million	2006 €million	2005 €million	2004 €million
Longford	1.59	0.64	1.09	0.83	2.76	1.86	7.88	13.65	18.86	17.82	20.67	18.47	15.51
Louth	9.57	5.18	2.68	3.44	11.38	5.42	18.44	31.74	38.81	41.88	37.95	28.48	28.44
Mayo	5.27	1.84	1.19	2.80	1.86	1.39	7.37	16.45	26.38	19.63	16.28	11.55	11.38
Meath	17.44	5.25	2.65	5.96	3.06	7.90	14.16	28.63	27.26	27.34	14.62	14.39	16.64
Monaghan	5.87	2.62	2.38	2.35	2.86	3.37	4.95	14.19	19.16	11.91	10.19	15.39	8.56
Offaly	2.85	2.27	2.58	1.36	2.88	3.06	13.98	16.03	23.13	22.22	15.06	11.35	6.16
Roscommon	1.65	0.74	0.72	1.17	2.01	1.28	3.91	8.40	9.88	11.71	9.25	15.99	4.89
Sligo	3.56	2.79	4.02	1.16	5.62	11.95	9.52	15.61	23.69	19.91	14.50	17.68	12.42
South Dublin	18.69	9.26	9.58	12.48	10.83	9.39	29.89	58.34	34.15	74.72	44.15	79.36	57.86
Tipperary (unified)	7.44	6.13	1.82	1.76	3.53	4.24	20.43	20.99	37.99	31.78	27.94	18.40	25.33
Waterford (unified)	9.60	6.84	5.67	2.87	10.46	9.23	14.06	26.81	38.09	53.47	42.11	24.11	18.56
Westmeath	4.31	1.11	2.20	0.70	3.55	2.52	9.55	14.40	17.52	16.64	16.82	9.92	8.37
Wexford	9.03	5.45	3.46	1.28	3.27	7.22	11.54	24.15	35.75	34.39	23.77	25.15	23.05
Wicklow	4.90	12.28	1.11	4.63	10.32	6.89	14.90	21.39	35.27	28.84	30.32	29.81	26.74
Total	316.41	238.29	126.98	124.36	182.46	223.93	526.75	828.84	1,133.84	1,043.06	951.45	821.25	704.03

Rent Controls

423. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 23 February 2017, if the application of the rent pressure zone scheme to the rental accommodation scheme, housing assistance payment and social housing current expenditure programme leases was intentional or accidental. [13155/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is the intention of the legislation to limit rent increases in private rented accommodation in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) to a maximum of 4% per annum, including in those tenancies supported by the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

The 4% limit does not apply to tenancies supported by the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). However, the effect that the limit is expected to have on market rent inflation will help contain cost increases from a local authority perspective in the context of the periodic rent reviews that form part of the SHCEP contractual arrangements.

Wastewater Treatment

424. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13197/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, brought into operation a grants scheme to assist with the cost of remediation of septic tanks and domestic waste water treatment systems which are deemed, following inspection under the Environmental Protection Agency's National Inspection Plan, to require repair or upgrading.

The grant scheme ensures that the limited financial resources available are targeted towards householders, particularly those on lower incomes, who incur expenditure directly as a result of

the implementation of the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012. The scheme does not apply to businesses.

Full details of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, are clearly set out in the explanatory leaflet and application form published on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Water/FileDownLoad,33607,en.pdf.

Unfinished Housing Developments

425. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of the estates in County Galway (details supplied) on his Department's unfinished housing estates list that remain unfinished. [13200/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The annual survey of Unfinished Housing Developments last completed by my Department in 2016 indicates that 15 unfinished housing developments remain in Galway, the details of which have been set out in the table. I intend to publish a full listing of all remaining unfinished developments as part of the Fifth Annual Implementation Report on the Government's Action Programme on Unfinished Housing Developments later this month.

Unfinished Housing Developments

Lios Garbh	-	Ballinasloe
Ard Na Speire	Moycullen Road	An Spideal
Bun Na Coille	Mountain Road	Moycullen
Carrigweir	Weir Road	Tuam
Corr An Tochair	Dunmore Road	Williamstown
Cottage Hill	Athenry Rd	Loughrea
Cuirt na hAbhann	Oranmore Road	Claregalway
Cul Na Coirre	Church Road	Headford
Garrai An Droichid	Killora	Craughwell
Lough Eala	St Brigids Rd.	Portumna
Bothar na Sleibhe	Loughwell	Moycullen
Pairc Na Ri	Park Rd Ballydavid South	Athenry
The Fairways/An Mhinleog	Tuam Road	Dunmore
Tir an Choir	Vicars Choral	Tuam
Ard na Gaoithe	Mount Pleasant	Loughrea

Pyrite Remediation Programme

426. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for homes that are affected by pyrite but have been left out of the current remediation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13255/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, 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.*

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 the 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.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

427. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to extend and expand the pyrite remediation scheme for homes that failed to reach the high thresholds set down under the previous Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13256/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, 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.*

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.

Local Authority Boundaries

428. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the boundary extension from County Waterford into south Kilkenny (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13260/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question Nos.160 and 161 of 15 February 2017. The position is unchanged.

Housing Assistance Payments Implementation

429. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the actions he will take to promote the acceptance by landlords of the HAP scheme in order that they will be more inclined to accept tenants availing of this benefit; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [13263/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a key Government priority and the accelerated roll-out of the scheme on a national basis was an important early action for completion in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

HAP is now available to all qualified households in 31 local authority areas, with over 19,000 households currently being supported by the scheme. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area at the end of December 2016 is available on my Department's website at the following link: *http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision.*

While the level of supply in some rental markets is challenging, the increased rent limits provided by the Government in July 2016, together with the additional discretion available to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limit where it is necessary to secure suitable accommodation, are allowing households to find suitable accommodation and willing landlords. In excess of 300 additional tenancies are being supported by HAP each week, and there are now some 15,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments.

My Department has engaged with the landlord sector since commencement of the scheme in September 2014. This has afforded the sector an opportunity to provide valuable feedback in relation to the operation of the HAP scheme and has, in turn with feedback from other sectors, helped to inform and shape the operation and implementation of the scheme into its next phase, i.e. a national scheme.

I have also recently launched a new HAP website, *www.hap.ie,* dedicated to providing prospective HAP tenants and landlords with the information that they need to better understand how HAP works. My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review, particularly in the Dublin area where the scheme has now been made available since 1 March 2017.

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland.

Traveller Accommodation

430. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has received an application for funding under the Traveller accommodation programme from Galway City Council in respect of a two bed extension of a property in Galway city (details supplied); when a decision will be made in relation to this application in view of the fact that the application for a housing extension was made to Galway City Council over a year ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13274/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) are strategic five-year rolling programmes for the provision of Traveller accommodation in a local authority area, with the current round of TAPs running from 2014 to 2018. Provision for unforeseen or emerging accommodation needs, such as an extension to a local authority property as outlined in the Question, would not be reflected in TAPs and I can confirm that My Department has not received any funding application from Galway City Council under its TAP for an extension to the property in question.

However, my Department provides funding to local authorities, including Galway City Council, under the Programme to Support Housing Adaptations and Extensions to Social Housing Units to meet the needs of households in a range of circumstances, including to address overcrowding. The management of the programme locally, and the selection, prioritisation and submission of individual projects, is a matter for each local authority. Ahead of the formal funding allocations for 2017, local authorities have scope to continue activity under the programme up to a maximum value of 65% of their 2016 allocation.

Emergency Services

431. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason Meath fire services are not being dispatched to assist the ambulance and paramedic services in County Meath (details supplied). [13282/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Responsibility for the provision of emergency medical services, including pre-hospital emergency care, rests with the Health Service Executive (HSE) which operates the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and emergency departments in hospitals in accordance with health sector legislation and national policy. The HSE operates under the remit of my colleague, the Minster for Health.

As Minister with policy and legislative responsibility for fire safety and the provision of fire services by local authorities, I am primarily concerned that local authority provided fire services are meeting their statutory obligations in respect of provision of fire services and fire safety. These responsibilities include the important activity of community and other fire safety initiatives as well as response to 999/112 calls. In 2013, the policy document "Keeping Communities Safe" was published and, for the first time, set out standards and norms against which local authorities can benchmark their fire services. In April 2016, the first report of the External Validation Group, titled "Local Delivery – National Consistency", was published. This report assessed the review process undertaken in each of the 27 local authority fire services, and provided an appraisal of the current state of our local authority fire services.

In general, there is a high degree of collaboration and co-ordination of emergency activity among the Principal Emergency Services. In some circumstances, the HSE's NAS calls for assistance from fire services in responding to certain categories of 999/112 emergency calls. Such calls are typically in respect of, but not limited to, ECHO (life threatening) emergencies. As well as being able to call on Community First Responders, the NAS is aware that many fire services are equipped with automatic external defibrillators and have trained their fire-fighters in Cardiac First Responder and Emergency First Responder to Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council standards. Fire services are so equipped and trained in the first instance for ensuring the health and safety of their own staff, but can use their skills and equipment where they encounter casualties at emergency incidents.

Fire services generally respond to calls for assistance from external bodies in accordance with protocols operated within the three fire services Regional Communications Centres. However, there is no national framework or agreement for cross-mobilisation between the Principal Emergency Services.

The feasibility of fire services being commissioned by the HSE to provide a response service in support of the NAS in responding to ECHO emergency calls is currently being discussed at national level at the Fire Services National Oversight & Implementation Group, which consists of fire service management and staff representatives. Any proposal emerging from these

discussions will be considered in the first instance by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and could be used as the basis for discussions with the Health sector on this matter, if relevant.

Experience has shown that any proposal for formalising such assistance needs to be subject to appropriate governance and cost reimbursement arrangements and to be set in the context of a service agreement which will not impact on or adversely affect fire services' primary roles. It is important in such circumstances to ensure that local authority and fire services' resources are not diverted from their statutory fire service and fire safety responsibilities where they are providing assistance for another public body. The potential impact on the current Community First Responders schemes would also have to be assessed.

Wastewater Treatment

432. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the estimated amount it would cost to adequately upgrade the infrastructure in the wastewater plants in the 38 agglomerations across the State that are deemed to be in breach of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive. [13292/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive mandates the required standards for the collection and treatment of waste water from urban areas and sets various deadlines for meeting these standards. All requirements of the Directive should have been met by the end of 2005 at the latest. As such, achieving compliance with the requirements of this Directive is a long standing issue.

With regard to the 38 agglomerations identified in the current EU infringement process, Irish Water estimate that investment of €1bn in waste water treatment plants is necessary to ensure adequate treatment of waste water from these urban areas.

It must be emphasised that this is the level of investment necessary to address specific failures with regard to appropriate treatment of waste water in the 38 agglomerations. Further significant investment is required to ensure ongoing compliance in all agglomerations, facilitate ongoing capital maintenance and upgrade needs, ensure the proper functioning of waste water collection systems, and provide for adequate treatment capacity to facilitate future population and economic growth.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

433. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 160 of 8 February 2017, the reason a housing assistance payment, HAP, was denied to homeless families for a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13316/17]

434. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to parliamentary question number 160 of 8 February 2017, if he will report on the examination his Department is undertaking of Part 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 regarding hosuing assistance payment, HAP, and regeneration areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13317/17]

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

Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 433 and 434 together.

I refer to the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 160 of 8 February 2017. The position remains unchanged.

One of the key functions of housing authorities is to provide or manage the provision of social housing support in a way that counteracts undue segregation between persons of different social backgrounds and ensures the provision of an appropriate mix of dwelling types and tenure classes.

Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority. Accordingly, local authorities may refuse to provide HAP in an area where they consider there to be an over concentration of social housing supports in place.

In relation to the individual case raised by the Deputy, local authorities are by law independent in the performance of their functions and I, as Minister, cannot intervene in relation to the procedures followed, or decisions made, by local authorities in the provision of social housing support, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

435. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13325/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details in relation to the expenses of Board members are available within the respective annual reports of the State agencies under the aegis of my Department. Where public servants are appointed to such Boards, no fees are payable. This is set out clearly in the Remuneration and Superannuation element of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, published by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, which also indicates that the implementation of and adherence to these arrangements is the responsibility of individual State Bodies.

Social and Affordable Housing

436. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to assist families that have out grown their affordable homes and cannot sell without clawback or rent them out to move to bigger homes for fear of being penalised; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this has caused untold and undue hardship for some persons in view of the fact it does not take cognisance of families growing or circumstances changing. [13372/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Affordable Housing Schemes helped qualifying applicants, who would not have

otherwise been in a position to purchase a home, to become home owners through purchase of designated affordable units. Houses sold to first time buyers under the various affordable housing schemes were priced at a significant discount from their market value. Buyers were free to sell their properties at anytime. However, in order to prevent short-term profit-taking on the resale of the house to the detriment of the objectives of the schemes, the schemes contained a clawback provision.

Under the clawback provisions, as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002, as amended, where the purchaser proposes to sell the unit within 20 years of the date of purchase, he/she must refund to the local authority a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of the unit. The percentage of the proceeds to be repaid will be related to the proportion of discount from the market value originally received from the local authority. A full refund must be paid if the unit is sold within the first 10 years of occupancy. A reduction of 10% per annum is given for each full year of occupancy between 10 and 20 years and after 20 years of full occupancy no refund would be due to the local authority.

However, where a person is selling an affordable home and the clawback amount payable would reduce the proceeds of resale below the initial price actually paid, the legislation provides for the amount of the clawback payable to be reduced to the extent necessary to avoid that result.

I have no plans to amend these provisions, which I consider to be equitable and reasonable.

Housing Assistance Payments

437. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department regularly inspects homes rented under the housing assistance payment scheme to check if they are fit for purpose and up to standard. [13373/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended by the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992.

Responsibility for inspection of rental properties as well as enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority. All landlords have a legal obligation, including those under HAP, to ensure that their rented properties comply with the regulations governing the minimum standards for rented accommodation. Under section 41 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, local authorities are required to commence this inspection process within 8 months of HAP being paid in relation to a particular dwelling if not already inspected within the previous 12 months.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recognises that the quality of rental accommodation is critical to the success and sustainability of the residential rental sector and its attractiveness as a long-term accommodation option for households. The inspection capacity of Local Authorities will be strengthened in order to increase the number and frequency of inspections. In addition to updated regulations, procedures for a more efficient, standardised and transparent inspections and enforcement approach across all Local Authority areas will be introduced; and specific ring-fenced funding for inspections will be provided from 2018 onwards, with the aim of achieving a 25% annual inspection coverage of rental properties

by 2021.

State Properties Data

438. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will make all leases of buildings taken out by councils and Departments transparent and post them online. [13374/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have no function in relation to the matter raised in the Question. This is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, as delivery of the Property Asset Management Delivery Plan and development of the State Property Register, which includes details of properties owned or leased by Government Departments, local authorities and state agencies, is being led by the Office of Public Works (OPW) chaired Steering Group on Property Asset Management.

The information sought in respect of local authorities is not held in my Department as property management issues are a day to day operational matter for the authorities concerned.

With regard to premises and sites occupied by my Department under leases, all such leases are with the OPW.

My Department also shares with other Government Departments the rent and ancillary costs of a premises occupied by Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels.

National Procurement Service Framework Agreements

439. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some local authorities publish the details of the companies that win their tenders, while others do not because they state it is commercially sensitive; and if he will instruct all local authorities to publish the details of the companies that win their tenders. [13375/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Publication of award information relating to tenders is required under both EU and National Procurement rules.

Under EU Directive 2014/24/EU and the European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016, contracting authorities that have awarded a public contract or concluded a framework agreement must publish a notice of the results of the award procedure no later than 30 days after the award of the contract or the conclusion of the framework agreement. Award notices must include the name and address of winning tenderer/framework members and the price of the winning tender. This Directive relates to public contracts exceeding the EU threshold of €209,000 (exclusive of VAT) for local authority contracts.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 10/14 also requires that buyers publish all Contract Award Notices over €25,000 on the eTenders website on completion of the award. This is a separate step to publication required under the EU Directive and Regulations. This provision came into effect from 1 August 2014.

In addition, under section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 each local authority is required to publish a FOI Publication Scheme that includes procurement information includ-

ing a link to all current tender competitions on the eTenders website and, on a quarterly basis, details of public contracts awarded for values over €25,000 (exclusive of VAT) including the name of the winning contractor and the value of the contract. This requirement came into effect on 14 April 2016.

The Local Government Strategic Procurement Centre, based in the Local Government Management Agency, is actively engaging with the Procurement Officers designated in each local authority to ensure full compliance with the requirements of procurement law and policy.

Overall lead responsibility for public sector procurement matters rests with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform.

Question No. 440 answered with Question No. 415.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

441. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the assistant principal officer position in his Department, previously held by a person (details supplied) will be filled; and the name of the senior official in his Department that is now responsible for liaising with a group (details supplied) of affected homeowners in County Donegal. [13385/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department keeps staffing matters under constant review in order to ensure all priority vacancies are filled in a timely manner and that resource allocations are balanced across the Department to meet key priorities as necessary. Officials within my Department's Housing Advisers and Building Standards Section continue to liaise with the group referred to in the Question on an ongoing basis.

Departmental Bodies

442. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the report of the expert panel examining problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in counties Donegal and Mayo will be published. [13386/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): An expert panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in April 2016 to investigate the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Donegal and Mayo. The panel have the following terms of reference:-

(i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

The expert panel on concrete blocks met on twelve occasions since it was first established and a similar number of meetings have taken place with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, the elected members of Donegal and Mayo County Councils, local authority officials, industry bodies, academics, public representatives and other interested parties. A substantial volume of information has been provided by affected homeowners in both counties, as well as from Donegal and Mayo County Councils; additional information was also provided through the consultation process.

The panel have now concluded their meetings and are in the process of finalising their draft report which is undergoing legal proofing, which I anticipate shortly. In this regard, I will await the outcome of the panel's report before considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Register of Electors

443. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will undertake a review of the register of electors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13421/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government recently agreed that work should now commence on modernisation of the voter registration process, in the context of facilitating the registration of voters that are resident outside the State in the event of an extension of the franchise at Presidential elections being approved by the people in a referendum. This provides an opportunity to undertake significant work on the voter registration process.

The modernisation of the voter registration process will deliver benefits by providing for the registration of all voters in an efficient and user-friendly manner, while also, vitally, protecting the integrity of the system.

Regeneration Projects

444. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will consider a submission by a residents' association (detail supplied) to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13475/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Neither my Department nor Cork County Council is aware of any submission by the Residents Association referred to in the details supplied.

The Revised Masterplan for Cork City Northwest Regeneration Programme was adopted in 2011, following extensive consultation with elected members, residents and other key stakeholders. This Plan clearly outlines the areas to be covered under the Programme and I understand that the residents in question are outside the area covered by the plan. There are no plans at this stage to review the boundary of the regeneration area.

It should be noted that the residents of Knocknaheeney and the greater Knocknaheeney area, however, do now enjoy better community facilities already delivered under the Regeneration Programme, including library facilities, a community garden, a new scouts hall, a new community hall and new community rooms.

I understand that Cork City Council is in regular contact with the residents of Harbour View Road and continue to meet with them an ongoing basis to address any particular concerns raised.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

445. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a person (details suppled) can have essential maintenance performed on their council home. [13496/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and the carrying out of responsive repairs for tenants living in social housing, is a matter for each individual local authority under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966 and are not directly funded by my Department.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

446. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce a scheme to assist those persons working but earning a low income to secure housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13550/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The current income limits for social housing support mean that individuals in different areas can earn up to €25,000, €30,000 or €35,000 after tax and qualify for social housing supports, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Families can earn more than this and still be eligible for support. I am satisfied that the current income eligibility limits provide a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources and ensure that the available resources are directed towards those most in need of social housing support. However, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, is scheduled to commence later this year.

Apart from long-term social housing support, there are other supports available for households to secure appropriate housing. The Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012, which set out the terms and conditions and key eligibility criteria for local authority mortgages, include maximum gross income limits but do not set minimum income limits. However, in assessing a loan application an applicant's borrowing capacity and ability to repay the loan in question must to be taken into account. It is important to note that while 4 local authorities have been designated to operate the Home Choice Loan, the loan is available to all eligible applicants nationwide.

I have no plans at present to re-introduce an Affordable Housing Purchase Scheme. However, a range of measures are being taken under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to increase housing supply overall, with the aim of creating a functioning and sustainable housing system which can meet housing demand at more affordable prices.

The plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system. Pillar 3, entitled *Build More Home,* has a key objective of increasing the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices, including by-

- Opening up land supply and State lands, including the Major Urban Housing Development Sites initiative, which identified large-scale sites in the main cities that are capable of delivering significant homes in the short to medium term to boost overall housing supply;

- €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund;

- National Treasury Management Agency financing of large-scale "on-site" infrastructure;

- Planning Reforms;

- Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions;

- Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs;

- Measures to support construction innovation and skills.

Pillar 4 of the Plan, entitled *Improve the Rental Sector*, provided for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is now being progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones.

Other measures taken to increase the supply of housing include -

- The enhanced supply of more affordable starter homes in key locations through a targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels;

- New National Apartment Planning Guidelines, reducing the cost of apartment building;

- Changes to aspects of the operation of Strategic Development Zones to enable swifter adjustments to meet market requirements;

- A vacant sites levy.

Local Authority Members' Remit

447. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of funding provided by his Department or agencies under its remit to individual local authorities for the provision of life saving equipment such as lifebuoys, defibrillators and safety signage, in tabular form for each of the past six years; the level of funding sought by local authorities over the corresponding period; his plans in relation to this area of safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13580/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department provides no direct funding for equipment of the types mentioned above. My Department supports local authorities through the setting of general policy and the provision of certain core funding. Local authorities also receive funding from a number of other Departments and agencies for activities they carry out on their behalf.

As democratically elected independent bodies, it is a matter for each local authority to deter-

mine its own spending priorities, including funding towards lifebuoys, defibrillators and safety signage, in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Regeneration Projects Expenditure

448. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the original budget planned for a project (details supplied); the final amount spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13637/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The major Ballymun regeneration project spanned almost 20 years, with Departmental funding requirements first coming into play in 1999. Due to the form and complexity of the programme, a single overall budget was not put in place.

The substantial programme, which included 24 projects, is now complete. Approximately €972million was spent on the programme, €775.3million of which was recouped by my Department.

My Department's oversight of the regeneration projects at this location was principally concerned with general progress on the overall programme and it continually liaised with the local authority on the strategic approach and general phasing of works. This ensured that the project progressed on a sustainable basis, particularly having regard to general budgetary constraints and with a view to achieving its original intended outcomes for the community in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

Building Control Management System

449. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a monthly housing completions record on the building control management systems from March 2014 to to date in 2017, broken down by county and indicating one off, estate housing, apartments, local authority, approved housing bodies and private sector, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13669/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The purpose of the Building Control Management System (BCMS) is to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their separate responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990. The system provides a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector.

The BCMS was not designed to report on housing completions. However, the BCMS does facilitate the receipt and lodgement of commencement notices, statutory certificates and compliance documentation in line with the Regulations (SI 9 of 2014). One such statutory certificate is the Certificates of Compliance on Completion, which confirms to the Building Control Authority that the building works, as constructed, are in compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations.

Certificates of Compliance on Completion are required for certain works that submitted a commencement notice on or after 1st March 2014. They are not required for one-off houses that have chosen to opt out of the statutory certification process since 1 September 2015. Cer-

tificates of Compliance on Completion may cover multiple buildings or works.

Building Control Authorities are required to keep certain information pertaining to building works that come under the Building Control Regulations 1997-2015 on a statutory register, including particulars in relation to the Certificates of Compliance on Completion. BCMS is centrally hosted by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the 31 Local Authorities and has enabled this information to be hosted on a central nationwide register, readily available and updated quarterly at *https://www.localgov.ie/en/link-type/bcms*.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

450. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to amend the new housing assistant payment website www.hap.ie to make it explicit that families that take part in the HAP scheme can be assured they will not lose their place on the housing list, in view of the fact that the absence of this information is giving rise to confusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13679/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): A dedicated Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) website, *www.hap.ie*, was launched on 1 March 2017 to coincide with the completion of the nationwide roll-out of the HAP scheme, with the introduction of the scheme to the administrative areas of Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. *www.hap.ie* provides a single national point of information on the HAP scheme for both landlords and tenants, before directing potential tenants to the relevant local authority.

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.

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 issued during the pilot phase of the scheme to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP tenants could avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list. With the completion of the HAP roll-out 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.

The information on *www.hap.ie* reflects the legislation and states that any HAP tenant who wants to access other social housing supports, may do so through the transfer system as operated by their respective local authority.

Public Participation Networks

451. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the criteria used to allocate funds to local authorities under public participation networks; the scheme the funds for this scheme are allocated from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13700/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As was the position in 2015 and 2016, funding of up to €50,000 is being provided by my Department in 2017 under the Local Government Fund (Other Miscellaneous Schemes) to each local authority to support the work of Public Participation Networks (PPNs), on the basis that this is supplemented by a minimum of €30,000 from each local authority's own resources. This funding is used to meet the costs of employing a resource worker to support the PPN Secretariat, the provision of office space, equipment and infrastructure, and other essential operating costs.

Earlier this year, my Department made an early initial payment of €30,000 to each local authority for PPNs from its annual commitment of up to €50,000. This was to ensure PPNs would have certainty of and access to funding from the outset. The balance of my Department's contribution (up to €20,000) will be addressed later in the year.

Separate funding is also provided by my Department under the Scheme of Supports for the Community and Voluntary Sector for the development of the PPN process and network. This funding is to meet costs including those associated with the National PPN Advisory Group, the roll-out of a vital client database system for PPNs and other general supports.

Housing Provision

452. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of residential units that will be commenced in County Kildare in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13719/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is not available within my Department.

In accordance with the Building Control Act 1990 and the Building Control Regulations made thereunder, a commencement notice signed by the owner must be submitted to the local building control authority not less than 14 days and not more than 28 days prior to commencement of works coming with the scope of the regulations, including the construction a new residential unit. The building control authority then has 7 days to determine the validity or otherwise of the commencement notice received; once validated, key particulars of the commencement notice are referenced on the public register of building control activity which can be viewed online at the following weblink - *https://www.localgov.ie/en/link-type/bcms*.

My Department publishes a statistical series based on commencement notices for new-build residential units submitted to each local building control authority each month. During 2016, commencement notices relating to a total of 919 new residential units were submitted to Kildare County Council. This is a 28% increase on the number of residential commencement notices submitted in Kildare during 2015 (718 units). In January 2017, the latest month for which details are available, commencement notices relating to a total of 73 residential units were submitted to Kildare County Council (the comparable figure for January 2016 was 36 units).

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 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 Kildare 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; 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, which are available on *www.rebuildingireland.ie*. The Third Quarterly Progress Report, covering Quarter 1 2017, is expected to be published in early May 2017.

Under the auspices of the Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, the Government will be keeping the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland under regular and active review.

European Court of Justice Rulings

453. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of voids in Kildare County Council that are currently under refurbishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13720/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities, including Kildare County Council have recently submitted the list of properties they wish to be included in the 2017 Voids Programme. These units are currently being assessed and I expect to announce details shortly of the 2017 funding for local authorities to address vacant social housing stock, including the breakdown of the targets and funding for each local authority. Local authorities have been advised that they should not delay in carrying out the necessary refurbishment works on eligible units, while waiting for the assessment and allocations.

It should be noted that over the period 2014-2016, my Department provided funding of over €1.3million to bring some 90 void units in Kildare back into use. The Deputy will, of course, be aware that the Voids Programme is separate from any other refurbishment works that Kildare

County Council may undertake from their own resources.

Local Authority Housing Provision

454. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the current turnaround time for voids in each of the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13721/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information on the turnaround time for voids is not collected by my Department. However the key objective of the Voids Programme is aimed at minimising the turnaround and re-let time of vacant units and returning them to use in a very energy efficient condition. Since the commencement of the Voids Programme in 2014, over 7,100 vacant social housing units have been returned to productive use. This figure does not include units which are returned by local authorities through funding from their own resources.

In the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness , commitments are set out in line with best asset management practices, which will see all local authorities operating to a national re-letting performance standard and greater use of a preventative maintenance approach to housing stock management.

Statistics on the average re-letting times for local authority social housing are set out in the report of the National Oversight and Audit Commission on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities, the last published report being for 2015, which is available at the following link: *http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2015-PI-Report.pdf.*

Local Authority Housing Data

455. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of funding that has been approved for Kildare County Council for the construction of houses in 2017 in respect of specific housing schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13722/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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 (AHB) 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/.*

Funding is provided to local authorities in line with their advancement of projects through construction. I expect that a number of the projects listed for Kildare County Council will commence on site during 2017, as well as in subsequent years; the precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects is a matter for Kildare County Council, in the first instance.

Accordingly, the level of funding that will be provided in 2017 to Kildare County Council

for their social housing delivery activity will be directly linked to the scale of delivery they achieve on these projects. I am keen that these projects are advanced as soon as possible and have assured local authorities that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

456. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the allocation to Kildare County Council under the repair and leasing scheme announced recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13723/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the local authority or an Approved Housing Body (AHB). This allows for the property owner to sign-up to a lease arrangement for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs, subject to a minimum of 10 years. The value of the repairs will then be offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease.

A property owner can either choose to arrange for a contractor to carry out the repairs themselves, or the local authority or AHB can arrange this instead. Property owners will not be required to take on landlord responsibilities and the local authority or AHB will have on-going management and maintenance responsibilities in respect of the properties.

The local authority will determine the eligibility for the scheme, having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative will be €40,000. My Department is working closely with local authorities to implement the scheme locally.

Following on from the success of the initial pilot in Waterford and Carlow local authorities, the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) is being rolled out on a national basis from 23 February 2017.

I am making an additional €26m available to fund the scheme in 2017, which brings the total amount available this year to €32m. This additional investment in 2017 means that delivery under the scheme can be accelerated and up to 800 vacant properties can be brought back into use as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists this year. This funding represents a frontloading of the €140m being made available for the scheme over the next 5 years. Over the period 2016 to 2021, it is anticipated that up to 3,500 units will be secured for social housing under this scheme. Funding to support the cost of bringing new social houses into use using the Repair and Leasing Scheme in 2017 will be released based on proposals submitted by local authorities to my Department rather than by allocation to each local authority. I have provided funding to support ambitious delivery under the scheme in 2017 and I would urge every local authority to work hard to secure units as early as possible and maximise the use of this investment.

I will be carefully monitoring the scheme in 2017 to ensure that it works well and is cost effective. Likewise, this analysis will assist in determining its delivery potential for future years,

as well as whether additional financial resources are required in that context.

The Repair and Leasing Scheme is one of a number of initiatives in Rebuilding Ireland to address vacant properties around the country. Other initiatives include the Buy and Renew Scheme. The full details of this scheme are being finalised and will be communicated to local authorities shortly. I have made an initial €25 million available for this initiative this year and propose to increase this to as much as €50 million in 2018, depending on the uptake. I expect this investment to deliver between 400 and 500 renewed houses for social housing use.

The initiative may present opportunities for local authorities and approved housing bodies to tackle dereliction in towns and urban areas, but prospective housing units will always need to be suitable for social housing use, in an area of need, and to represent reasonable value for money.

Commercial Rates

457. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the timeframe for any forthcoming legislation to reform the commercial rates system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13724/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

Commercial rates form an important element of the funding of all local authorities. The principle of local authorities levying rates based on an independent valuation is well established and I have no plans to change this. However, the legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century. I have asked my Department to develop proposals for the preparation of a consolidated Rates Bill to modernise and consolidate the legislation in this area. I hope to bring proposals in this area to Government in the coming weeks.

Rent Controls

458. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position in relation to the ability of a landlord to increase the rent by more than the rent pressure zone limit of 4% per annum in respect of a rental property situated within a rent pressure zone in a circumstance in which the existing rent on the property is below the market rent in the area; if the landlord is allowed to bring the rent up to the market rent if this means exceeding the 4% increase limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13740/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As set out in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, rents in a Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) may only increase by a maximum of 4% annually for a period of 3 years. The first rent review in relation to a property in an RPZ can only take place 24 months after the time that the tenancy was established or the time that the rent was last set. The first rent review in an RPZ after that 24 month period will allow a maximum rent increase of 4%. This is 2% per annum applied pro-rata for the period since the rent was

last increased. If the period since the rent was last set is longer than 24 months the permissible increase can be applied pro-rata.

Landlords who have not raised rents for significant periods of time will be able to increase rents in proportion to the period of time since the rent was last set provided the increase concerned does not exceed the limits applicable in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) as laid out in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016.

The existing requirement that the rent set may not be above the local market rents for similar properties still applies and the landlord must also provide three examples of rents for similar properties in a comparable area to demonstrate this.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

459. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding scheme a rural water programme liaison officer's salary, rural water programme group water scheme subsidy payments and recoupment of lost income from rates on water infrastructure are funded from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13781/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Group water schemes subsidy payments, a contribution towards the salary costs of local authority Rural Water Programme Liaison Officers and the compensation of local authorities in respect of rates income foregone are all recouped to local authorities by my Department through the Local Government Fund.

European Court of Justice Rulings

460. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a 2013 European Court of Justice decision in regard to planning (details supplied); the consequences this ruling has on planning law here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13824/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is presently engaged in consultations with planning authorities regarding potential modifications required to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing as a result of the above decision, with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in development plans comply with Article 43 (Freedom of Movement of People) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

On conclusion of these consultations, my Department will be engaging with the European Commission on proposed changes to the Guidelines, with a view to issuing updated Guidelines to planning authorities on the matter in due course.

Electoral Reform

461. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to review the boundaries for the next local elections; if he will introduce changes to the new districts established by the last reform initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13826/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform, involving a report to Government and the Oireachtas by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, including a commitment to consider reducing the size of local electoral areas. Work is proceeding on the development of proposals for the preparation of the report. An important input to this process is an initial operational review of the revised local government structures completed in 2016, which included surveys of local authority members and chief executives. The results indicated that the revised structures are generally operating well but will need more time to bed down fully and that there is some scope for improvements to certain aspects of the system.

The most recent review of local electoral areas was carried out from November 2012 to May 2013 by a Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee established under the Local Government Act 1991. Depending on the outcome of consideration of the mid-2017 report, any review of local electoral area boundaries would be undertaken in good time before the 2019 local elections. Any changes to municipal district boundaries which might be warranted can also be considered in that context as each municipal district is composed of one or more than one local electoral area.

Electoral Reform

462. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of money spent by his Department on the Waterford Kilkenny boundary report; the amount of money spent by Waterford and Kilkenny county councils in preparing their respective inputs to the process; if the figures include the number of person hours worked by all parties involved in the process; if not, if he will quantify this cost; and the next steps in the process and the time frame for a final decision. [13839/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): General expenses recouped to date specifically in relation to the Waterford boundary review committee amounted to €8,051. This recoupment was in respect of expenses incurred by the committee members. The members provided their time and expertise on a pro bono basis, and no fees were paid to them.

An amount of €70,460 was paid to the Institute of Public Administration in respect of their work in supporting all 4 boundary committee reports. Details of costs, including man-hours, incurred by the individual local authorities are a matter for that authority, and I have no function in relation to any expenditure they may have incurred from their own resources in connection with this matter.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

463. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the first bundle of 520 new social housing homes across six sites, which had approval granted by the then Minister on 13 October 2015 and are to be developed through the PPP programme, will advance to planning and construction; the timeline for this project; when he expects all 520 units to be constructed and ready for occupation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13868/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Social Housing PPP programme provides for an investment with a capital value

of €300 million and is expected to deliver 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles.

The first bundle, comprising six PPP sites providing for over 500 units in the greater Dublin area, is being developed in co-operation with the local authorities concerned. Two of the sites are located in Dublin City, with one each in South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth. Dublin City Council has been appointed to act as the lead local authority for the delivery of the social housing PPP Programme in respect of this first bundle. It is expected that the process of seeking planning approval for the first bundle will commence within the coming month.

The procurement process is being led by the National Development Finance Agency. Tender documents are currently being finalised and are expected to be published in the coming months.

Each individual bundle of sites takes an estimated 37-48 months to deliver, in total. It is expected that construction would commence in 2018 with units becoming available in 2019.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

464. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason for the delay in progressing a housing scheme (details supplied) from stage 1 approval in Q2 2015 to stage 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13869/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Social housing need is, in the first instance, a local issue and local authorities must respond to the nature and extent of that local need by devising and implementing appropriate targeted proposals that best fit the specific needs in their areas.

For that purpose, my Department has put in place a wide range of programmes that are available to all local authorities to generate increased social housing supply. In addition, my Department has put in place the structures and funding required for the early advancement of social housing supply proposals put forward by local authorities.

Local authority housing construction projects require careful consideration and planning, and their advancement through the various phases of development is in the first instance a matter for the proposing local authority. My Department has been working closely with South Dublin County Council to facilitate and accelerate the delivery of social housing in the South Dublin area. South Dublin County Council already has a strong pipeline of construction projects in development and is being encouraged by my Department to prepare and submit additional construction proposals to further strengthen that pipeline. Details of South Dublin County Council's construction pipeline are available at the following weblink: *http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/.*

With regard to the project referred to by the Deputy, I am advised that South Dublin County Council intends to progress to a Stage 2 pre-planning submission in the second quarter of 2018. When the Stage 2 submission is received by my Department, it will be considered responded to as a matter of urgency.

An Bord Pleanála

465. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the body or person to which An Bord Pleanála is responsible; the number of

An Bord Pleanála's decisions which were overturned by judicial review in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13949/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): An Bord Pleanála was established in 1977 under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1976 and is an independent statutory body responsible for the determination of planning appeals and certain other matters under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, as well as the determination of applications for strategic infrastructure development such as major road and railway cases. It is also responsible for dealing with proposals for the compulsory acquisition of land by local authorities and other bodies under various enactments. An Bord Pleanála also has functions to determine specific appeals under the Building Control, Water and Air Pollution Acts.

As Minister, my role in relation to the planning system is primarily to provide the policy and legislative framework to support the system's operation, comprising the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, and a suite of planning guidelines, which planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are obliged to have regard to in the performance of their planning functions. The day-to-day operation of the planning system is, however, a matter for planning authorities and An Bord Pleanala themselves.

Furthermore, under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, as Minister, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is, or may be concerned.

In 2016, there were 5 legal cases in which decisions by An Bord Pleanála were not upheld in the relevant Court judgments while a further 3 cases were conceded by the Board. In 10 other cases, judgments were given upholding the Board's decisions. Proceedings against the Board were dismissed or withdrawn in a further 7 cases. In 2 other cases, the High Court refused to grant leave applications to relevant parties for judicial review. Statistical information in relation to legal proceedings involving An Bord Pleanála is published in the Board's Annual Reports. Reports up to 2015 are available at the weblink below; the 2016 report will be published later this year. http://www.pleanala.ie/publications/index.htm.

Rental Accommodation Standards

466. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the need to increase and enforce health and safety regulations in respect of houses that are being converted for the rental market; if his attention has been further drawn to the number of houses that are being converted without planning permission and with little regard to the existing planning regulations; the remit under which the enforcement of existing regulations fall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13953/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended by the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. The Regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light and safety of gas and electrical supply. With very limited exemptions, these regulations apply to local authority and voluntary housing units as well as private rented residential

accommodation.

To ensure that the standards reflect the requirements of a modern rental market, a review of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, has been carried out and revised regulations will come into effect from I July 2017.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority supported by a dedicated stream of funding provided from part of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees collected by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

Since the establishment of the RTB, over €32 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 185,000 inspections have been carried out in this period. Following the enactment of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, local authorities have a strengthened legislative framework available to them which provides for the issuing of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Notices where landlords are in breach of their obligations. Fines for non-compliance with the regulations were also increased; the maximum fine increased from €3,000 to €5,000 and the fine for each day of a continuing offence increased from €250 to €400.

Housing Data

467. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the fact that only 4.6 % of households spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing, which is the fourth lowest in the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13972/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I note the Eurostat statistic referred to by the Deputy.

As the Deputy will be aware, a range of measures are being taken under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to increase housing supply overall, with the aim of creating a functioning and sustainable housing system which can meet housing demand at more affordable prices.

The plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system.

Under Pillar 2 (Accelerate Social Housing) the target is very clear – 47,000 new social housing homes to be delivered by 2021 at a cost of €5.35 billion. Local authorities have a strong pipe-line of approved projects in place, with targets agreed to end 2017. My Department is already working with local authorities to agree post-2017 targets, to ensure a continued pipeline of developments to the end of the 6-year Action Plan period.

Pillar 3, entitled *Build More Homes*, has a key objective of increasing the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices, including by:-

- Opening up land supply and State lands, including the Major Urban Housing Development Sites initiative, which identified large-scale sites in the main cities that are capable of delivering significant homes in the short to medium term to boost overall housing supply;

- €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund;

- National Treasury Management Agency financing of large-scale "on-site" infrastructure;

- Planning Reforms;

- Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions;

- Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs;

- Measures to support construction innovation and skills.

Pillar 4 of the Plan, entitled *Improve the Rental Sector*, provided for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is now being progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones.

Other measures taken to increase the supply of housing include -

-The enhanced supply of more affordable starter homes in key locations through a targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels;

- New National Apartment Planning Guidelines, reducing the cost of apartment building;

- Changes to aspects of the operation of Strategic Development Zones to enable swifter adjustments to meet market requirements;

- A vacant sites levy.

Grant Payments

468. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the application to his Department by a person (details supplied) for part funding for the re-thatching of a listed thatched building at the same address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13978/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department recently received an application for a thatching grant from the person listed at the details supplied. The application in question is currently being reviewed.

Under my Department's renewal or repair of thatched roof grant scheme, a grant of up to €3,810, or two thirds of the approved cost, whichever is the lesser, may be payable in respect of necessary works to renew or repair the thatched roofs of houses. In the case of medical card holders, a grant of up to €6,350, or up to 80% of the approved cost, may be payable in respect of houses situated on the mainland, rising to €8,252 where the house is situated on a specified off-shore island. Eligibility under the grant scheme is contingent on the house being occupied as a normal place of residence on completion of the approved works.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

469. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of mortgage to rent applications granted since its introduction, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14029/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Up to 31 December 2016, a total of 3,575 cases have been submitted under the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, which was introduced in 2012 for borrowers of private commercial lending institutions. Of these, 2,723 were ineligible or terminated during the process, 217 have been completed, with 635 being actively progressed. The reasons why a case has not progressed are varied and can depend on the lender, the property, the household and the ability of the Approved Housing Body sector to increase their involvement in the scheme. Statistical information relating to the Mortgage to Rent Scheme since its inception, including a breakdown of cases by county, is available on the Housing Agency's website at the following weblink: *https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/Mortgage-to-Rent.aspx.*

A number of amendments were made to the MTR scheme in July 2015 to enable more properties to qualify and to make the scheme more flexible and accessible to borrowers.

Notwithstanding the amendments already made, the Government is committed to supporting households in long-term mortgage arrears to remain in their homes. A Review of the Mortgage to Rent Scheme was published on 8 February 2017 and represents the completion of an early action in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The Review is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: *http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/.*

The Review has explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommends a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. Key actions include:

- Lenders will be required to formally communicate with borrowers as to why they are not suitable for the scheme.

- The property price threshold for a house in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow is being increased to €365,000 (from €350,000) while the threshold for an apartment / townhouse in these areas is being increased to €310,000 (from €300,000). For the rest of the country, the threshold for a house is being increased to €280,000 (from €250,000) and for an apartment / townhouse to €210,000 (€190,000).

- Flexibility will be provided in relation to the size of properties which qualify for the scheme. In practical terms, this means that an assessment of the property size suitable to a particular household will allow for a maximum of two additional bedrooms in the property above the actual needs of the household, with the property still being considered eligible.

- There are a number of actions to improve knowledge and understanding of the scheme. A range of state agencies will be facilitated to assist and guide borrowers who could benefit from the scheme. A Step by Step Guide for Borrowers will be produced alongside a range of other targeted information supports.

I am confident that the implementation of the actions put forward in the Review will make the MTR process quicker, more transparent, easier to navigate for borrowers and ultimately, more accessible to more households in mortgages distress.

In addition, the Review concludes that the current financial model of the scheme may not be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. Currently, the MTR scheme relies on Approved Housing Bodies to purchase from lenders properties that have been voluntarily surrendered by eligible borrowers. The Government has been actively exploring potential mechanisms that would facilitate investment in social housing, including the off-balance sheet potential of private institutional investment. A number

of private equity firms have expressed an interest in purchasing mortgage debt portfolios from commercial banks with a view to exploring the potential for them to access the MTR scheme model for the borrowers in occupation of the mortgaged property. They are seeking an alternative arrangement that would see the mortgaged property staying in the funding firm's ownership and the property itself leased back to the local authority in circumstances where the borrower is eligible for MTR and the borrower would therefore remain in their own home.

One of the outcomes of the Review is that in order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency will work with a number of financial entities who have come forward with an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of pilot alternative lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots, a targeted market testing exercise is currently underway by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), on behalf of my Department, to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangements to ascertain if they would be viable for a mortgage to rent cohort. The objective is to explore what is available within the current market and to determine if this alternative model will benefit a greater number of households.

A detailed financial assessment of the structure of the funding of the MTR scheme will be undertaken in advance of the budgetary process for 2018. The assessment will be informed by the early impact of the other actions proposed by the review, as well as the outcome of the experience with the pilot lease arrangements, and the availability of financial resources overall.

The Government has also established a new Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, known as Abhaile, operated by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) in conjunction with the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI), the Legal Aid Board and the Citizens Information Board. The objective of the Abhaile Scheme is to ensure that a person who is at risk of losing their home due to their mortgage arrears can access independent expert financial and legal advice, which will help them to identify their best options for returning to solvency – with priority to their remaining in their home, where that is a sustainable option. The website, *www.keepingyourhome.ie*, contains comprehensive details of the supports available under the Scheme.

EU Directives

470. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the date of publication of the legislation transposing the provisions of Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment into national legislation; the proposed date for commencement of the legislation; if he will issue guidance, including consideration of the transitional arrangements for projects subject to EIA, that are already underway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14084/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Work is presently underway in my Department on the drafting of amendments to the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, necessary to apply the requirements of Directive 2014/52/EU relating to environmental impact assessment of certain public and private projects, including transitional arrangements set down in Article 3 of the Directive. Article 2 requires Member States to bring into force by 16 May 2017 the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the Directive.

My Department will issue guidance to planning authorities in due course on the amendments made to the 2000 Act for the purpose of implementing the Directive.

Departmental Legal Costs

471. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14131/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department seeks, where possible, to minimise legal costs and avail of the services of the Chief State Solicitor's office and the Attorney General's Office in terms of the provision of legal advice and representation of the Department in court cases.

The table sets out details in relation to external legal advice provided to my Department by legal firms since 2015. The table does not include costs associated with the Planning Tribunal.

2015	Arthur Cox	€20,766
2016	Mc Cann Fitzgerald	€28,912

Housing Data

472. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the CSO figures which highlight the decline in home ownership in Dublin; his further views on the number of renters in the capital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14143/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I note the recent CSO figures referred to by the Deputy.

As set out in the Housing Policy Statement 2011, the Government aims to secure choice, fairness and equity across tenures and to deliver quality outcomes for the resources invested. The overall strategic objective is to enable all households access good quality housing appropriate to household circumstances and, as far as possible, in their particular community of choice.

This commitment was reiterated in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, which provided that "The provision of quality housing in the right locations underpins wider national and regional economic and social progress, not least by ensuring that our cities, towns and villages are successful and attractive places to live and work."

As the Deputy will be aware, a range of measures are being taken under Rebuilding Ireland to increase housing supply overall, with the aim of creating a functioning and sustainable housing system which can meet housing demand at more affordable prices.

The plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system. Pillar 3, entitled Build More Homes, has a key objective of increasing the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices, including by

- Opening up land supply and State lands, including the Major Urban Housing Development Sites initiative, which identified large-scale sites in the main cities that are capable of delivering significant homes in the short to medium term to boost overall housing supply;

- €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund;

- National Treasury Management Agency financing of large-scale "on-site" infrastructure;

- Planning Reforms;

- Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions;

- Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs;

- Measures to support construction innovation and skills.

- Pillar 4 of the Plan, entitled Improve the Rental Sector, provided for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is now being progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones.

- Other measures taken to increase the supply of housing include

The enhanced supply of more affordable starter homes in key locations through a targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels;

- New National Apartment Planning Guidelines, reducing the cost of apartment building;

- Changes to aspects of the operation of Strategic Development Zones to enable swifter adjustments to meet market requirements;

- A vacant sites levy.

Ministerial Allowances

473. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14566/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): A Minister or Minister of State cannot claim overnight accommodation expenses while staying in Dublin as all Ministers are headquartered in Dublin.

Records in my Department have been examined to confirm that since 2011 there has been no breach of this policy.

Jobs Initiative

474. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the JobsPlus scheme; the number of hours a person has to work before the employer can avail of this scheme; if a person can retain his or her medical card while on the scheme; the period for which this will be; if they will lose his or her medical card at the end of that period and have to reapply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12928/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): JobsPlus provides a direct monthly financial incentive to employers who recruit employees who are long-term on the live register and those transitioning into employment. It provides employers with two levels of payment - €7,500 and €10,000. The €7,500 is paid primarily to those who are 12 months or more on the live register with the higher grant paid in respect of those who have been unemployed

for more than 24 months. The incentive is paid in monthly instalments over a two year period provided the employment is maintained.

JobsPlus employments must be new, full-time positions. The job being offered must be for a minimum of 30 hours per week and the employee must work at least four days in any seven day period.

People who have been unemployed for a minimum of 12 months and have a medical card may retain the card for a period of three years if they commence employment. JobsPlus employments do not differ from other employments in this respect.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Registration of Marriages

475. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a marriage (details supplied) has not been allowed to proceed; when a decision will be made on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13205/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have made inquiries of the Registrar General and he has informed me that the position is as follows:

Where a person wishes to marry in Ireland, and has been granted a divorce in another jurisdiction, legal recognition of this divorce under Irish law is examined in the General Register Office. Legal recognition of foreign divorces in Ireland is a complex area of law involving proof of domicile in a country where the divorce has been granted.

This case involves the recognition of a foreign divorce and the examination of the divorce is ongoing. The General Register Office will inform the registrar involved as soon as this process is concluded.

Carer's Benefit Payments

476. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will, in the case of permanently disabled persons that employ full time or part time carers, make them exempt from PRSI and employer contributions in view of the fact that in most cases they are employing these carers from an exhaustible fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13396/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In general employees are liable to pay Class A PRSI at the rate of 4% on their weekly earnings. In addition their employer is liable to pay PRSI at the rate of 8.5% or 10.75%, depending on whether or not weekly earnings exceed €376. The payment of PRSI ensures that these employees have access to the full range of short and long term social insurance benefits, including State pension contributory.

Carers employed on a full or part time basis and receiving a salary, are subject to PRSI on their earnings, in the same manner as other employees. This ensures that carers have to access shot-term social insurance benefits, such as jobseekers or illness benefits in the event that they become unemployed or ill, as well as ensuring that they can establish entitlement to State pension contributory. Exempting PRSI on the earnings of those employed as full time or part time carers would exclude these workers from entitlement to social insurance benefits.

Financial assistance for the provision of care to those permanently disabled is already avail-

able under the existing carer's benefit and carer's allowance schemes. These schemes provide payments to carers looking after a person who needs support because of age, disability or illness, based on PRSI contribution and other qualifying conditions, in the case of carer's benefit, and based on means, in the case of the carer's allowance scheme.

Social Welfare Offices

477. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff on temporary contracts in the social welfare offices in Carrick-on-Shannon for each of the years 2013 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the reason staff have been left on long term temporary contracts which resulted in no vacancies in County Leitrim under the recent recruitment of permanent clerical officers for the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13498/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Temporary clerical staff are recruited to cover absences of permanent staff on maternity leave, long term sick leave, other statutory leave and also to provide cover for some staff availing of the shorter working year scheme. They are also recruited to alleviate work pressure in certain areas, and to assist in the roll-out of the Public Services Card project.

The table shows the number of Temporary Clerical Officers assigned to the Department's offices in Carrick-on-Shannon in each of the years 2013 to date in 2017.

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 to date
15	15	49	50	24

The Temporary Clerical Officers in the Department's offices in Carrick-on-Shannon were recruited for the reasons mentioned above and also to facilitate specific project work on a temporary basis. Therefore the question of filling these posts by way of the assignment of permanent staff does not arise.

Citizen Information Services Funding

478. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the funding that has been made available in 2017 per county for a specific project; and the person or body that is the manager of three specific centres (details supplied). [13583/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) under the aegis of my Department is responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money advice and budgeting) and advocacy on a wide range of public and social services. The Citizens Information Board delivers on this remit through direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners, and by funding targeted projects.

In 2017, the Citizens Information Board has been allocated €54.05 million from the Exchequer, of which €13.1 million has been assigned to the 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS's). A breakdown of this allocation per CIS is set out in the table.

The Citizens Information Services at Mallow, Mitchelstown and Fermoy are under the remit of the North and East Cork County Citizens Information Services Company, Lower Patrick Street Fermoy and the Regional Manager with responsibility for the services is Ms. Rose Morris.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizens Information Services – 42 local services	Approved Grant 2017€
Ballyfermot	248,600
Blanchardstown	240,000
Carlow	199,600
Cavan	240,000
Clare	311,900
Clondalkin	322,600
Cork City North	205,000
Cork City South	365,000
Donegal	681,500
Dublin 12 & 6W (Crumlin)	252,000
Dublin 2,4,6	258,400
Dublin 8 & Bluebell	273,000
Dublin City Centre	630,500
Dublin City North Bay	142,300
Dublin North West	379,400
Dublin Northside	262,500
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	264,200
Fingal (North County)	312,632
Galway	437,600
Kerry	378,200
Kilkenny	187,500
Laois	237,900
Leitrim	242,400
Limerick	380,000
Longford	270,300
Louth	361,800
Mayo	386,600
Meath	371,000
Monaghan	250,000
North & East Cork County	321,000
North Kildare	216,000
Offaly	304,000
Roscommon	265,000
Sligo	276,100
South Kildare	233,200
Tallaght	305,000
Tipperary	503,000
Waterford	312,400
West Cork County	305,000
Westmeath	352,132
Wexford	342,200
Wicklow	321,000

Social Welfare Benefits

479. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated total additional annual cost of ensuring via social welfare increases that all household types currently in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment are brought into compliance with the minimum income standards developed by an organisation (details supplied). [12798/17]

483. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual additional cost of ensuring via social welfare increases that all household types currently in receipt of a weekly working age social welfare payment are brought into compliance with the minimum income standards developed by an organisation (details supplied) and index linking weekly State pension rates to inflation over the next five years. [12802/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Question Nos. 479 and 483 together.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) developed a model of a minimum income standard (MIS). The MIS is defined by the VPSJ as "*the gross income a household needs in order to reach their minimum essential standard of living* ".

The VPSJ's *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2016* (MESL) is derived from a negotiated consensus (based on focus groups with representative households, and discussions with policy-makers and experts e.g. nutritional standards) on what people believe is a minimum. According to the VPSJ, it is a standard of living which meets an individual's / household's physical, psychological and social needs, calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet these minimum needs. The costs incorporate factors such as food, clothing, personal care, health, household goods, household services, communications, social inclusion, education, fuel, transport, personal costs, insurance, savings and contingencies.

The model developed by the VPSJ's produces a minimum income standard which is dependent on whether the household is, among other factors:

(i) in a rural or urban location (the main differences are that transport and fuel costs are judged to be higher in rural locations);

(ii) composed of a single working age person, a couple, a single- or two-parent family, a single pensioner or a pensioner couple; and

(iii) living in private rented accommodation, social housing or is an owner-occupier.

It should be noted that the MESL for welfare households assumes that households are eligible for a medical card, and as such, health and insurance costs are reduced accordingly, although the cost of over-the-counter medicines and prescription charges remains. While the model assumes that pensioners have the Free Travel pass and the Household Benefits package, it does not assume this for working age. It should be noted that certain working age recipients of welfare payments do qualify for Free Travel e.g. all recipients of Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, and Carer's Allowance.

The costing outlined below is based on the following assumptions:

(i) The minimum income standards used for the costings are those for urban locations;

The Minimum Income figures used in this costing are from the *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2016* (the latest publication available), and its Appendices, and the costings are based

on 2017 estimated recipient numbers. I understand that the VPSJ will publish a 2017 MESL update later this year.

Children:

The cost of a child in 2016 varies depending on the child's age, according to VPSJ research (Appendix 3A). The VPSJ research places the cost of an infant at €82.81, a pre-school child at €50.20, a child in primary school at €84.66 and a child in secondary school at €132.58 per week. These costs comprise of food, clothing, household goods, health, social inclusion, transport, education, etc. The costs do not include childcare.

For the purposes of this costing exercise, a weighted average increase was calculated (based on the CSO's 2017 estimated population distribution by age). Taking into account the value of the qualified child increase (€29.80 per week), child benefit (€140 per month) and Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance where appropriate (€100 or €200 per annum, depending on the age of the child), an average increase of €27.61 is required to the QCI to bring the payment in line with the VSPJ's direct cost of a child.

- The cost of increasing the qualified child increase by €27.61 per week is €548.88 million in a full year. This includes the cost of increasing the Back to Work Family Dividend which is linked to the rate of the qualified child increase (€12.56 million).

Working Age:

The VPSJ research finds that the minimum income standard (MIS) for a single working age adult with no children is €218.64 per week (Appendix 4A). For the costing, all weekly working age personal rates were increased to €218.64 per week. The monetary increase varies depending on the current weekly personal rate. It should be noted that the value of increases such as the Living Alone Allowance and supplementary payments, where relevant, such as the Household Benefits Package, Fuel Allowance, and Free Travel, have not been taken into account in this costing.

The MIS for a working age couple with no children is €335.55 (Appendix 4A), which is an increase of €116.91 from the single person's rate. The current welfare increase for a qualified adult is €124.80. Accordingly, the qualified adult rate was not changed in this costing.

- The cost of increasing all working age personal payments to €218.64 per week is €966.1 million in a full year. It should be noted that this cost also includes increasing the Jobseeker's Allowance age-related reduced rates to €218.64 per week, at a total cost of €152.32 million in a full year.

Pensioners:

The MIS for a single pensioner is €221.43 and for a pensioner couple is €269.85 (Appendix 7A). Accordingly, there are no welfare increases required to reach the MIS for pensioners as current welfare payments are in excess of the MIS for this group.

The table outlined the cost of index linking the State Pension, and all weekly payments to pensioners aged 66 and over (i.e. State Pension Contributory, State Pension Non Contributory, Widow/er's,, Surviving Civil Partner Contributory Pension, Carer's Allowance recipients aged 66 and over, Deserted Wife's Benefit recipients aged 66 and over, Death Benefit Pension recipients aged 66 and Incapacity Supplement recipients aged 66 and over).

The costings are based on 2017 recipient numbers, and include the cost of proportionate increases in reduced rates and the qualified adult rates of payment, where applicable. It should

be noted that the costings do not take into account changing trends (increases or decreases) in recipient numbers from 2018 onwards.

The Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices used in the table below is sourced from the Department of Finance's 2017 Budget Day book. This provides forecasts for inflation for the five years 2017 to 2021 inclusive; however, there is no projection available for 2022.

Pensions	2018–1.8%€m	2019–1.9%€m	2020– 1.9%€m	2021–1.9%€m
State Pension (Contributory)	84.5	101.5	117.4	133.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.2	21.7	22.2	22.7
All weekly pension payments	126.0	146.6	164.6	183.2

It should be noted that all of the costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Social Welfare Benefits

480. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of index linking payments (details supplied) to inflation over the next five years. [12799/17]

481. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of index linking all weekly social welfare payments to inflation over the next five years. [12800/17]

482. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of index linking all social welfare payments to inflation over the next five years. [12801/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 480 to 482, inclusive, together.

The information that the Deputy has requested is detailed in the following table. The costings are based on 2017 recipient numbers, and include the cost of proportionate increases in reduced rates and the qualified adult rates of payment, where applicable. It should be noted that the costings do not take into account changing trends (increases or decreases) in recipient numbers from 2018 onwards.

The Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices used in the table below is sourced from the Department of Finance's 2017 Budget Day book. This provides forecasts for inflation for the five years 2017 to 2021 inclusive; however, there is no projection available for 2022.

Additional Cost of Social Protection Payment Rate Increases linked to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices, 2018 to 2021

Benefits	2018 – 1.8%€m	2019 – 1.9%€m	2020 – 1.9%€m	2021 – 1.9%€m
Jobseeker's Benefit	6.2	6.7	6.9	6.9
Jobseeker's Allowance	40.1	44.6	44.6	44.6

Benefits	2018 – 1.8%€m	2019 – 1.9%€m	2020 – 1.9%€m	2021 – 1.9%€m
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.5
Illness Benefit	9.9	10.7	10.9	10.9
Disability Allowance	23.9	26.6	26.6	26.6
One Parent Family Payment	7.2	7.1	8.1	8.1
Carer's Benefit	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6
Carer's Allowance	10.2	11.1	11.3	11.4
State Pension (Contributory)	84.5	101.5	117.4	133.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.2	21.7	22.2	22.7
All weekly Social Welfare payments	285.6	324.2	345.8	367.3
All Social Welfare payments	335.2	377.5	400.0	422.4

The cost of increasing all weekly social welfare payments in line with projected inflation includes the qualified child increase, the Living Alone Allowance and the over 80s allowance. It also includes increasing the rates for Community Employment, Tus, Rural Social Scheme, Gateway and Job Initiative but it does not include increasing the top-ups paid on these schemes. Furthermore, it includes increasing the average payment value of the Family Income Supplement in line with projected inflation.

In addition to the weekly social welfare payments, all social welfare payments includes the monthly Child Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Household Benefits scheme payments, and the annual Carer's Support Grant. Provision is also made for an increase in line with inflation for Fuel Allowance and the Widowed Parent Grant.

All of these costings are based on 2017 estimated recipient numbers. *Question No. 483 answered with Question No. 479.*

Household Benefits Scheme

484. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the social welfare rights of survivors, widows and widowers under 60 years of age in view of the fact that those over 60 years of age can retain household benefits if their deceased spouse was in receipt of them, whereas those under 60 years of age cannot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12806/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on HHB for over 425,000 customers.

The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who

are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Therefore anyone aged less than 70 years of age must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from the Department or satisfy a means test in order to qualify for HHB.

People in receipt of HHB aged under 66 are generally in receipt of payments such as Invalidity Pension, Disability Allowance or Carers. These payment types mean that the recipients are unable to work full time and earn additional income. This is not generally the case for people in receipt of widow's contributory payment who are aged less than 66. These recipients are of working age and may take up full-time employment, at any level of remuneration, without losing entitlement to their widow's contributory payment.

In general, widow's pension only becomes a qualifying payment for HHB once the recipient reaches the age of 66 (State pension age) to ensure alignment with secondary benefits that are available to people in receipt of the State pension.

The concession whereby widows aged between 60 and 65 years, whose late spouse/civil partner received HHB from my Department, may qualify for the package was introduced at a time when State pension age was 65 and this cohort of widows were seen as less likely to be in a position to take up employment than those of a younger age. In many cases, such a withdrawal would only have been for a very short period, as the payment to their household would have recommenced when they reached 66.

Any decision to extend the concession to widows aged less than 60 or to allow recipients of widow's pension of any age to qualify for HHB would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations. It would also be necessary to consider whether they would be a priority group for the extension of such benefits ahead of other groups such as the unemployed or lone parents.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

485. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of payments by county that have been made to families by the community welfare officers as top ups to the rent supplement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12816/17]

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 supporting approximately 45,500 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. In addition, the Protocol arrangement in place with Threshold is operational in the areas where supply issues are particularly acute covering Dublin, Cork, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow and Galway City. Since the introduction of this flexible approach, almost 11,300 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased rent supplement payments. A county breakdown of these payments is provided in the attached 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 Louth area in October 2014, with the number of HAP recipients (c. 1,350) in Louth now exceeding the number of rent supplement recipients (800). In addition to the ongoing transfer of tenancies from rent supplement to HAP, the majority of new applicants in Louth seeking State support towards their rent are being supported under HAP rather than rent supplement.

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.

Total Increased Rental Payments & Active HAP Tenancies by County as of 13 March 2017

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County	Active HAP Tenancies
CARLOW	75		75	475
CAVAN	68		68	22
CLARE	60		60	1,077
CORK	454	104	558	3,056
DONEGAL	-		-	1,406
DUBLIN	4,358	2,591	6,949	2,787
GALWAY	208	3	211	958
KERRY	218		218	72
KILDARE	562	3	565	954
KILKENNY	136		136	753
LAOIS	119		119	21
LEITRIM	102		102	15
LIMERICK	17		17	1,623
LONGFORD	313		313	22
LOUTH	161		161	1,340
MAYO	3		3	493
MEATH	445		445	626
MONAGHAN	1		1	332
OFFALY	68		68	349
ROSCOMMON	62		62	23
SLIGO	1		1	241
TIPPERARY	290		290	1,185
WATERFORD	62		62	1,173
WESTMEATH	380		380	35
WEXFORD	23		23	62
WICKLOW	404	3	407	58
Overall Total	8,590	2,704	11,294	19,158

Pensions Legislation

486. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he has been alerted to the possibility of the reduction of benefits to various pension fund subscribers throughout either the public or the private sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12830/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): If the funding of a pension scheme is not sufficient to satisfy the Funding Standard, the trustees may apply to the Pensions Authority for what is referred to as a "Section 50 order". Under such an order, accrued benefits relating to members' past service can be reduced.

Scheme members subject to a Section 50 amendment must be notified in advance of the proposed reductions. This notification must include the circumstances of the Section 50 application, and the proposed reductions, including general illustrations of their effect.

Members then have one month to make written observations on the proposed reductions, and the trustees must consider these observations before making an application to the Pensions Authority.

Neither the Minister nor the Department of Social Protection are notified of intended section 50 applications by trustees. I am advised that from 2009 until the end of 2016, the Pensions Authority has granted approval to 128 schemes to reduce benefits under section 50 of the Pensions Act.

Public sector pension schemes are under the remit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform so I do not have any information on reduction in benefits for those schemes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

487. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of funding for elderly persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12852/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on these elements of the household benefits package for over 425,000 customers. The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen significantly each year, as the number of eligible customers grew. At the end of September 2013 there were almost 396,000 receiving the telephone allowance compared to approximately 316,000 people in 2007. This was an increase of 25%, or an average increase of approx. 4% 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 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, I announced a further increase in the rate of State pensions by €5 which now brings the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory) to €238.30.

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 €34 per month. The value of these increases is in excess of the value of the telephone allowance previously provided.

Accordingly, I have no plans to restore the telephone allowance, and have instead concentrated on increasing the basic rate of pension for all older people. Any decision to restore the telephone allowance would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

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. Any queries in relation to the running of this scheme should be directed to the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

488. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the recent decision to suspend jobseeker's payment with a view to reinstatement in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12859/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As per response to PQ 8884-17, payment of jobseeker's allowance was suspended when the person concerned declared means from self-employment to an officer of the Department which when combined with means from insurable employment resulted in her weekly means exceeding the prescribed limit. Following representations in the present PQ, a further meeting was arranged with the person concerned wherein an officer of the Department undertook a review of her circumstances. Following this review the position remains unchanged.

An appeal in respect of the person concerned was received in the Ballyfermot local office on 10th March 2017. This appeal is currently being processed and the person concerned will be informed of the outcome on completion of this process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications

489. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if basic supplementary welfare will issue to a person (details supplied). [12862/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Basic supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) has been refused on the grounds that the person concerned has failed to supply adequate supporting documentation to show that her means are less than the prescribed SWA rate appropriate to her circumstances.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Eligibility

490. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Wexford can claim under the partial capacity benefit scheme retrospectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12917/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a scheme which allows a person, who may not have full capacity for work, return to employment and continue to receive a payment from my Department. To be considered for PCB a person must, at the time of the application, be in receipt of either illness benefit for at least six months, or invalidity pension. A person who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor (MA) who assesses the restriction on their capacity for work. When the MA gives an opinion, the matter is then considered further and a decision is made on the case.

A person assessed with a moderate level of work incapacity gets 50% of the personal rate of illness benefit or invalidity pension by way of PCB. A person assessed with a severe level of work incapacity gets 75% of the personal rate of payment; a person assessed with a profound level of work incapacity gets the full personal rate of payment. Increases in respect of a dependent spouse/partner and qualifying children are paid in full.

The person concerned is not currently in receipt of one of the qualifying payments for receipt of PCB and, therefore, cannot be considered for PCB at present. The retrospective award of PCB is not allowed.

Social Welfare Benefits

491. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a renal diet allowance was reduced by €5 a month in respect of a person (details supplied); and if it will be restored. [12933/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is in receipt of a diet supplement along with her primary social welfare payment. As a result of an increase in the rate of her primary payment she was notified that her diet supplement would be reduced by the same amount with effect from the 16th March. However, legislative provision has since been made so that this will not happen for persons in such circumstances and she will be notified of this. As she is due to be paid her next supplement until the 28th March she will not, in fact, experience any reduction in the rate of payment. I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

492. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a rent allowance payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12955/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The client concerned has a daughter who has a pending claim that is considered assessable income for the purposes of the client's rent supplement entitlement. Should that claim not be awarded before the 31st of March, the Department will award the clients rent supplement based solely on the client's income. A reassessment can subsequently be carried once the claim award rate is known.

I am aware that your office has been in contact with Philip in my office on this issue. Philip has advised that there was outstanding information that had not been sent into the Department by the client. I am also aware that you have a meeting request in with Department Officials.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

493. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will make illness benefit MC1 applications available online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12964/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The current IT systems which administer the Illness Benefit schemes are being modernized. A key part of this project is the overhaul of medical certification. A new A4 sized certificate is being designed which will allow GPs give a wider range of diagnoses in line with the WHO international standard of classification – ICD10. The new certificate will also give GPs greater flexibility on durations of certification. The new certificate will be scannable which will automatically generate payments to customers and GPs.

Separately a process is underway with the HSE to explore the possibility of leveraging new developments in GP IT practice systems to incorporate medical certification for my Department. Talks are at an early stage but I am hopeful of a successful outcome. New developments, both paper and electronic, are due to go live in Q1 2018.

Carer's Benefit Data

494. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) was in receipt of carer's benefit and if they received PRSI credits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12990/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Credited contributions are automatically awarded to a person when they are receiving Carer's Benefit. Credits are awarded at the same rate as the last paid PRSI contribution. These credits help protect future entitlement to social welfare benefits and pensions.

The person concerned was in receipt of carer's benefit from 20 November 2014 to 16 November 2016 and has been awarded credits for this period.

My Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 28 October 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.

As part of the application process, applicants are required to submit their latest set of accounts if they or a spouse, civil partner or cohabitant is self-employed.

In this case the applicant's spouse is a self-employed auctioneer and he owns or shares in the ownership of an unspecified number of houses yet no set of accounts were furnished with the application.

Accordingly, the matter was referred to a social welfare inspector (SWI) on 28 February 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

If the person concerned qualifies for CA she will also qualify for credits as there would be no break in her contribution record following her carer's benefit claim.

Should her application for CA be unsuccessful, she can maintain her social insurance record by paying voluntary contributions (VC). Last month I announced reforms I have made to the PRSI system to make it easier for people to make VCs. Up to now, people had to make an application for VCs within 12 months of the end of their employment or after their last credited contributions. I have now extended that period to 5 years.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If you require any further assistance with this query, please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Social Welfare Offices

495. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Social Protection if plans are in place to securely share information in real time within Intreo and related Departments in order that hours of individual staff productivity are not wasted requesting the same information repeatedly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13027/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department is working towards consolidation on a single ICT 'platform' - the Business Object Model implementation - BOMi. This work is carried out as part of my Department's continuous Service Delivery Modernisation programme.

As this programme progresses, all of my Department's customer and claim-related systems will be integrated on the BOMi platform, ensuring that all customer and claim information is fully and automatically available across all of my Department's schemes and places of business.

Separately, my Department continues to move towards having all customer documentation scanned and therefore immediately available to all staff, irrespective of location.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance

496. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there are discretionary payments available for families with wheelchair users that need access to a suitably adapted car in view of the fact that this would save on taxi fares in the long term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13028/17]

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 and urgent needs payments in 2017.

There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. The ENP scheme is demand led and pay-

ments 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.

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

The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme, operated by Revenue, provides a range of tax reliefs linked to the purchase and use of specially constructed or adapted vehicles by drivers and passengers with a disability. Further information is provided on the Revenue website at *http://www.revenue.ie.*

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. I am informed that the Minister for Health is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the cost of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns.

Pension Provisions

497. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to the financial hardship on those in co-ordinated occupational pension schemes that have retired early, in many cases through ill health, and whose pension has reduced by up to €1,000 per month on reaching 65 years of age in view of the fact they will not be entitled to a State contributory pension until they are 66 years of age and are not entitled to jobseeker's benefit; and his plans to rectify this situation. [13085/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years, which is the current State pension age. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

Re-introducing the State pension (transition) would have a significant Exchequer cost. It is estimated that the net cost of re-introducing this pension from 2018 would be in the region of €84 million per annum, and this is expected to increase over time.

There is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

In January 2016, an Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established specifically to examine the implications arising from prevailing retirement ages. The final report of the Group made a number of recommendations to support working and retirement practices. This included a request to the Workplace Relations Commission to prepare a Code of Practice under Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 to help manage the engagement between employers and employ-

ees regarding retirement issues and longer working. The final report, the recommendations of which were accepted by Government in August 2016, is available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website.

People aged 65, where eligible, may claim appropriate working-age payments, such as Jobseekers benefit or Invalidity Pension, provided they satisfy the conditions of those schemes, and whether they qualify will depend upon their individual circumstances.

I hope this clarifies that matter for the Deputy.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

498. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number and percentage of bank refusals of proposals put forward by mortgage advisers within the Abhaile, PIPs and ISI schemes. [13091/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Abhaile service for borrowers in home mortgage arrears was officially launched in October 2016. An information campaign to raise awareness of the range of valuable supports now in place for borrowers in home mortgage arrears commenced last month.

A key component of the service is a new voucher based scheme for which MABS is the gateway. This provides access for people who are insolvent and in home mortgage arrears, to defined levels of independent expert financial and/or legal advice and assistance, free of charge. Qualification for help under the scheme is based on the applicant being (a) in mortgage arrears on their home; (b) insolvent; (c) at risk of losing their home because of their mortgage arrears; and (d) reasonably accommodated. The primary focus is to help borrowers to put sustainable solutions in place with their lenders and wherever possible to keep them in their homes.

To date, 5,182 vouchers have been issued in respect of 3,229 Principle Private Residences. Of these, 4,029 were issued to borrowers to avail of the services of a Personal Insolvency Practitioner; 1,027 to borrowers to obtain legal advice and assistance from the panel of solicitors; and 126 vouchers in respect of borrowers wishing to avail of the Personal Insolvency Court Review Service.

In addition to the specialised services which can be accessed through the voucher system, advice and assistance is available to borrowers in home mortgage arrears through the MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears service. To date, 3,234 people have availed of the MABS DMA service.

Home mortgage arrears cases, due to their nature, are dealt with on an individual case basis. Degrees of complexity will obviously vary as will the approach of the lenders involved. Some home mortgage arrears cases are more easily resolved, while others require more than one professional intervention, and involve more protracted and sometimes multiple engagements with lenders in an effort to put sustainable solutions in place and where possible keep individuals and families in their own homes. Under the Abhaile scheme, those providing financial and legal advice and assistance to distressed borrowers can use a range of approaches in response to the individual needs of each case. While lenders in some cases may refuse initial proposals, they may later agree to subsequent resolution proposals as the case evolves.

At this time, outcome data of the type necessary to determine the number and percentage of refusals by lenders of proposals put forward by advisors providing financial and/or legal service to borrowers is not available. Cases of this nature are, as expected, taking time to process, from

assessment of the financial or legal difficulties to finding, where possible, sustainable solutions for borrowers in serious debt. Data gathering arrangements are already underway and as cases progress, the general nature of resolutions, where achieved, will be captured. I expect more comprehensive statistical data to be available in relation to the outcomes achieved for borrowers who availed of the various Abhaile services later this year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Measures

499. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if forthcoming legislation on ending the compulsory retirement age will extend to those taking part in community employment schemes. [13093/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Community Employment (CE) is a non-statutory scheme put in place to support persons who are long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups to gain the confidence and skills to re-enter the labour market. Schemes are sponsored by local community and voluntary groups who provide valuable support services to local communities. These sponsoring organisations employ supervisory staff to administer the scheme.

Funding is provided by the Department to the sponsoring organisations for the employment of staff up to state pension age. Once the staff member reaches state pension age (currently 66 years of age), that person can no longer be funded under CE. This is a long-established procedure and As CE placement can run to state pension age I have no plans to change these arrangements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Scheme

500. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) still has to attend Turas Nua to complete the programme, even though they will be signing off jobseeker's allowance and starting full-time employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13109/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Participants on JobPath receive intensive individual support to help them to overcome barriers to employment and to assist them in finding jobs and when they find employment they will continue to receive support calls from their personal advisor for at least three months and up to twelve months while in employment and will not be required to attend any meetings during that time. The support provided will reduce as the person settles into the job and they can opt out of the support calls at any time during that period

If the Deputy would like to pass on the contact details of the customer mentioned, my officials will make contact with them to discuss their concerns.

Youth Guarantee

501. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans regarding the

youth guarantee; if there are plans for targeted initiatives; if he will be drawing down further funding for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13150/17]

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.

This strategy has been succeeding; by the fourth quarter of 2016 the number of people in employment was up by almost 212,000 from the lowest level reached in 2012.

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 close to 80,000 on average in 2009 to 35,000 on average in 2016. The most recent figures show youth unemployment down by 4,000 year-on-year to 30,000 in Q4 2016. Having being far above typical EU levels, Irish youth unemployment is now significantly below the EU average.

Policies to reduce youth unemployment, framed in the context of the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee, concentrate assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. To this end there is monthly engagement by case officers with all young unemployed to facilitate their return to employment. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan sets out the additional initiatives that are provided for those who do not find employment. This includes reserved places for the young unemployed on existing schemes as well as youth-specific programmes. *Pathways to Work* 2016-2020 continues these initiatives and additionally commits to: increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed; ensuring that monthly engagement, at a minimum, is consistently applied and maintained; restructuring the First Steps programme; and implementing the Defence Forces Skills for Life programme.

Some elements of the programmes that contribute to Ireland's response to the Youth guarantee are part-funded by the EU's Youth employment Initiative (YEI). The YEI allocation for the relevant Irish programmes is €68m. This amount matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m. The YEI is integrated into ESF programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. Seven actions were originally selected for YEI funding, namely the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; JobBridge (now closed to new participants from October 2016); JobsPlus Incentive Scheme; Tús; Youthreach, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Momentum. These actions are underway and are being fully funded up-front by the Exchequer.

This funding is available for drawdown before the end of 2018 and while a claim for funding has not been made to date it is expected that the funding will be fully drawn down. The ESF Managing Authority and the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) maintain an ongoing overview of the funding allocations under the PEIL and will re-allocate the available funding as required, in accordance with the EU Regulatory provisions. The PMC has agreed in principle to the inclusion of the Community Training Centres, which are funded by the ETBs in consultation with SOLAS, as an approved activity under the YEI with effect from 1 January 2017.

The ESF co-financed Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) for the period 2014-2020, contains a total budget of €1.153 billion, comprising ESF and Exchequer contributions of €542.43m each and an EU Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) budget contribution of €68.145m. The overall YEI allocation is €204m. The PEIL includes proposed allocations for over 20 activities, including the YEI, being implemented across a range of bodies.

While no claim for funding has been made to date, it is expected that the funding allocated will be drawn down during the programming period. Furthermore, as the activities concerned are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer there is no resulting reduction or delay in the funding available to those activities.

The ESF Managing Authority, within the Department of Education Science and the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) maintain an ongoing overview of the funding allocations under the PEIL and will re-allocate the available funding as required, in accordance with the EU Regulatory provisions, over the lifetime of the PEIL.

Under the ESF Regulations, initial and annual pre-financing is provided by the Commission, resulting in receipts of €51.8m for the PEIL to date. Of this €51.8m, €28.3m relates to ESF advances and €23.5m relates to YEI advances. €20.4m (€18m ESF and €2.4m YEI) of these receipts have been distributed, while the remaining €31.4m (€10.3m ESF and €21.1m YEI) has or will be reimbursed to the Commission in the absence of a claim being made. Work on the designation of the relevant ESF authorities, including the provision of a national computerised accounting and information system for EU funds to meet the 2014-2020 functionality requirements is continuing.

I understand that the Department of Education and Science expects that this designation work will be completed in the coming months and that it is proposed to commence the preparation of a first interim claim for payment from the Commission once the process of designation has concluded. This claim will be made within the EU Regulatory deadlines to ensure no loss of ESF receipts.

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 information or assistance please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

502. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason illness benefit is no longer paid to working widows in receipt of the widow's pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13157/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The social welfare system is primarily a contingency-based income support system, with entitlement based on a number of defined contingencies such as sickness, unemployment, old age or widowhood. The income support system is underpinned by a general principle of 'one person, one payment' even if a person may experience more than one contingency at the same time. For example, an unemployed person may become sick. The general approach is that if a person experiences more than one of these contingencies at the same time, he or she can receive only one of those payments. This principle is common to other social security systems.

In the past, there were a limited number of exceptions in the social insurance system to this general principle particularly in the context of short-term benefits. For instance, recipients of one-parent family payment, widows and widowers pensioners etc. could, until recent years, also receive short-term social insurance benefits, such as illness benefit and jobseeker's benefit at half-rate at the same time. These overlapping payment arrangements were introduced in the early 1950s when the social insurance system was first established, at a time when there were only 10 individual social welfare payments and when rates were significantly lower in relative

terms than they are now.

In the context of the difficult fiscal environment in recent years and the Government's commitment to maintain existing core rates of primary payments for social welfare recipients, the concurrent payment of half-rate illness benefit and jobseeker's benefit in addition to one-parent family payment, widows and widowers pensions etc. was discontinued from January 2012. It is realistic and prudent to maintain the underlying principle of 'one person, one payment' for the social welfare system. To do otherwise could potentially lead to very significant consequences for its sustainability in the long-term.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

503. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will clarify media reports regarding the centralisation of the MABs and CIS services (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13217/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Citizens Information Board (CIB), which has statutory responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the Citizens Information Services (CIS) decided, on 15th February 2017, to restructure the governance arrangements of these services. The Citizens Information Board (CIB) assures me that there will be no job losses, no closure of services, no change to service delivery locations and no change to the terms and conditions of serving staff during the lifetime of the restructuring programme. There will be no disruption to CIS and MABS services for those who use them. The decision was communicated by the Board to all CIS and MABS Boards and to all staff on the same day.

The decision comes after a lengthy and extensive analysis of options and a detailed consultation period with all stakeholders on the need for a more streamlined governance model. It is worth clarifying that the new governance arrangements are not aimed at centralising the services provided by CIS and MABS. The restructured governance arrangements are being implemented at local company board level only. The decision taken will simply reduce the number of individual local CIS and MABS company boards from ninety three (93) to sixteen (16). A new regional board structure will be put in place which will comprise eight (8) CIS boards and eight (8) MABS boards.

The valuable work carried out by the employees and volunteers working in CIS services and the employees of MABS services will continue as heretofore. A more streamlined governance structure will result in a more targeted use of valuable staff resources, re-directed to increased front line service delivery, made possible by reduction in the current significant administrative burden associated with maintaining ninety three (93) individual companies nationwide.

The changes will bring the CIS and MABS organisations more into line with modern public service governance guidelines and requirements where significant State funding is involved. In 2017, CIB is set to receive State funding of €54 million, of which €15 million is allocated to CIS services (including €13.1 million to the 42 local Citizens Information Services, €1.2 million to Citizens Information Phone services and, the balance, €0.7 million to central and other supports), and €24.6 million is allocated to the network of MABS services (including €15.4 million to the 51 local MABS, €0.3m to National Traveller MABS, €2.0 million to MABS National Development Company, €3.3million to the MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears initiative, €3.5 million to the Abhaile service, and the remaining €0.1m to MABS central supports).

Following on from the decision of the Board, a Restructuring Implementation Group is being set up by CIB to examine all aspects of implementing the new sixteen (16) board model. This work will include examination of the establishment costs of the new structure and the potential for future savings derived from the reduction in the administrative burden associated with ninety three (93) individual local companies. Current costs are an aggregate of the costs incurred by each of the ninety three (93) local companies on items such as audit fees, professional fees (including legal services), payroll administration and board of director expenses. While cost is not the driver of the restructuring project, some efficiencies are likely to result from moving to a reduced sixteen (16) company model. The main aim of the project is to improve existing governance arrangements and optimise the benefits from operating a more modern, streamlined and customer focused service delivery model.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

504. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 7 March 2017 (details supplied) if, by the logic contained therein, the national average supervisor participation ratio will need to increase to 25:1 before a scheme is approved for an assistant supervisor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13227/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection is the funder of Community Employment (CE) schemes. CE Sponsors are the legal employers of CE Supervisors. Each application by a CE Sponsor for supervisory grant support is examined on a case-by-case basis.

Where a CE scheme maintains an approval level of 26 or more participants, additional supervisory grant support may be considered for an assistant supervisor position. My Department will only consider such grant support when the Sponsor submits a detailed job description for the additional supervision tasks. Each application is then examined on a case-by-case basis.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

505. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will confirm that in line with the one-person-one-salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13326/17]

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

I can confirm that remuneration, in the form of board fees, is not paid to any public servant on the boards of these bodies.

Family Income Supplement Payments

506. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if arrears due to a person (details supplied) in relation to their claim for family income supplement will be paid out immediately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13346/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In order to qualify for FIS the person concerned must be engaged in full-time remunerative employment as an employee for at least 38 hours per fortnight (19 hours per week). It is a further condition for the receipt of FIS that claimants cannot claim Jobseekers Benefit (JB) and FIS concurrently. The person concerned was awarded Family Income Supplement (FIS) from 2nd June, 2016 to 31st May, 2017.

On the 6th December, 2016 the person concerned applied for Jobseekers Benefit (JB), and this automatically stopped the payment of FIS.

FIS payments have now been reinstated for the person concerned and any arrears due for FIS during this period have now issued to their designated bank account.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

507. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13419/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 November 2016.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 3 January 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

The SWI has requested a number of financial documents, which the person concerned has not yet provided. Once these have been provided and the SWI has completed his report, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Data

508. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications made for exceptional needs payments between January 2014 and December 2016; the number and percentage of those applications which were successful; the total number of such applications between January 2014 and December 2016 which related to assistance with exceptional needs due to serious illness; and the number and percentage of those applications which were successful. [13436/17]

509. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications between January 2014 and December 2016 which related to assistance with funeral, burial or cremation costs; and the number and percentage of those applications which were successful. [13440/17]

510. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount paid in relation to all exceptional needs payments approved between January 2014 and December 2016 relating to assistance with exceptional needs due to serious illness. [13438/17]

511. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount paid in relation to all exceptional needs payments approved between January 2014 and December 2016 relating to assistance with exceptional needs due to funeral, burial or cremation costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13439/17]

540. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount paid in relation to all exceptional needs payments approved between January 2014 and December 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13680/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 508 to 511, inclusive, and 540 together.

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.

Details of the number of payments and expenditure under the ENP scheme for the years 2014 to 2016 are set out in the attached tabular statement. Statistics are maintained relating to payments that issue under the ENP scheme, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. The statistics do not provide information on whether the exceptional need has arisen due to serious illness.

An application can be made under the ENP scheme for assistance with funeral and burial expenses where there is an inability to pay these costs, in part or in full, by the family of the deceased person without causing hardship. From January 2014 to end of December 2016, over 8,900 payments with a value of some €14.7 million have been made in respect of funeral and burial costs.

Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme should contact the Department. I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Number of Payments and Expenditure under Exceptional and Urgent Needs Payment schemes in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

-	2014	2015	2016	Total
No of payments	107,100	101,600	100,100	308,800
Expenditure (€m)	€30.1	€31.0	€32.2*	€93.3

* Provisional Outturn

Motor Insurance

512. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the procedure followed by his Department if a traffic accident occurs whereby an employee of a community employment scheme is driving their own vehicle for the purpose of work and is not covered by insur-

ance for such incidents which happened during the course of work; if his Department has had such cases; if it covered the costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13453/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): If a person uses their vehicle for work purposes they are obliged to inform their insurance company. This situation is no different for participants of Community Employment (CE) schemes who are employees of CE Scheme Sponsors.

It is the responsibility of the CE participant to inform their motor insurers if they are using their car for business purposes and have their car insurance policy adjusted accordingly. My Department does not have any role in relation to covering road traffic accident costs in these circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

513. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to his recent meeting with district representatives, the progress that has been made in the relocation of a Department agency to Ballybay in addition to the retention of the 30-plus jobs that were lost to the town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13454/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection delivers its services in County Monaghan through our network of offices including Branch Offices, Community Welfare Clinics, Activation Services, Social Welfare Inspectorate Services, Community Employment Services, Local Employment Services (LES) and the JobPath Programme. Provision of information and access to income supports is provided by the Departments Community Welfare Service, which holds a weekly clinic in Ballybay. In addition the Department funds the Local Employment Service and the EmployAbility Service, both of which have offices in Ballybay and provide valuable support to the people of Monaghan. The Department also provides funding for Community Employment Schemes in Ballybay and in nearby Bawn Latton.

The Department thus continues to provide a high standard of services to the people of county Monaghan and has successfully implemented many positive changes in recent years to enhance these services. Over the coming years our wide ranging programme of organisational development will continue to support our efforts to deliver and improve our services, support economic growth and promote employability in county Monaghan.

As discussed at the meeting with local Oireachtas Members and Councillors from the Ballybay-Clones Municipal District on Wednesday 5th October 2016, it is not proposed to open an Intreo Centre in Ballybay or to relocate one of the Department's agencies there. I will however continue to be fully supportive of any initiatives that will boost employment opportunities – be they from the public or private sector - for people in the Ballybay area in the future.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff

514. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of temporary staff that are being employed at each local and divisional office throughout the country, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13460/17]

515. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of employing temporary staff at local and divisional offices throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13461/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 514 and 515 together.

There are currently 320 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) employed in the Department.

Temporary clerical staff are recruited to cover absences of permanent staff on maternity leave, long term sick leave, other statutory leave and also to provide cover for some staff availing of the Shorter Working Year scheme. They are also recruited to alleviate work pressure in certain areas, and to assist in the roll-out of the Public Services Card project.

TCOs are paid on a weekly pay scale ranging from €419.29 to €715.62 for staff in the Single Pension Scheme or €432.45 to €680.62 for staff in the Unestablished Pension Scheme post 2004. Some of the costs involved in the recruitment of temporary staff can be offset, for example, where permanent staff avail of certain unpaid leave such as the shorter working year scheme or where staff on long-term sick leave are on a reduced salary.

The table below shows the various locations where the TCOs are assigned.

TABLE 1 – LOCATION OF TEMPORARY CLERICAL OFFICERS

Location	Number of TCOs	Location	Number of TCOs
Dublin Offices			
Balbriggan	2	Clifden	1
Ballyfermot	1	Clonmel	4
Ballymun	1	Cork	13
Bishops Square	5	Donegal Town	1
Blanchardstown	3	Drogheda	5
Clondalkin	3	Dundalk	10
Coolock	4	Dunfanaghy	1
Cork Street	3	Dungloe	1
D'Olier House	2	Ennis	4
Dun Laoghaire	2	Galway	6
Finglas	4	Kilkenny	4
Gandon House	11	Killarney	4
Kilbarrack	2	Letterkenny	12
Kings Inn St / Parnell St	13	Limerick	16
Navan Road	2	Listowel	1
Nth Cumberland St	7	Longford	26
Nutgrove	3	Loughrea	4
Store St	11	Macroom	1
Swords	1	Monaghan Town	3
Tallaght	16	Navan	3
Provincial Offices		Newbridge	8
Arklow	3	Newcastlewest	1
Athlone	2	Roscommon	5

Location	Number of TCOs	Location	Number of TCOs
Ballina	1	Sligo	18
Bantry	2	Thurles	2
Bray	3	Tralee	3
Buncrana	5	Waterford	8
Carlow	2	Westport	2
Carrick on Shannon	22	Wexford	6
Carrigaline	2	Wicklow	2
Castlebar	1	Tullamore	3
Cavan	3		
		Total	320

Carer's Benefit Applications

516. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for carer's benefit for a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13462/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Carer's benefit (CARB) can be paid to a person for a maximum of 104 weeks for each care recipient. CARB was paid to the person concerned for 59 weeks from 17 December 2015 to 1 February 2017 for the full-time care and attention he provides for his wife.

He has applied to extend payment of CARB from 2 February 2017. Additional employment information was requested by letter on 31 January 2017 and by phone on 9 February from the person concerned. Once he supplies this information, the application will be processed and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Minister. If you require any further assistance with this query, don't hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Disability Allowance Applications

517. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13463/17]

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 27 January 2017.

On 11 March 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation 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.

JobPath Scheme

518. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently participating in the JobPath scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13477/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are currently just under 70,000 jobseekers availing of the JobPath service.

As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment.

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

JobPath Scheme

519. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of complaints made against the two companies charged with operating the JobPath scheme; the nature of such complaints; the steps taken by his Department to address issues raised by participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13478/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The overall reaction to JobPath has been very positive. To date 82,798 Jobseekers have been referred to the service, with 215 complaints received in total – one quarter of one per cent.

163 complaints have been responded to and are now closed. 52 are in progress.

The total number of complaints for Seetec is 81. The nature of these complaints is as follows: Customer Service 43; Clients reluctant to engage 27; Data Protection 4; Employer Recruitment Process 3; Travel Expenses 1; Transport Issues 1; Equal Status Act 1; and Irish Language 1.

The total number of complaints for Turas Nua is 134. The nature of these complaints is as follows: Customer Service 108; Policy 15; Legislation 5; Office Layout 4; and Data Protection 2.

Each JobPath provider has a Complaints Procedure which is advertised in every location. In the event the customer has exhausted that process but they remain dissatisfied with the response to their complaint, they may then request my department to carry out a review. Following the review and my department's response, should the customer still remain dissatisfied, they can refer the matter to the Office of the Ombudsman.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Reviews

520. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if JobPath will form part of the review to be carried out by his Department of activation programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13479/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In 2015 My Department initiated a rolling multi-annual evaluations programme, using econometric and qualitative methods, of the 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). Evaluation reports have already been published on the Back to Education Allowance scheme and on JobBridge. It is planned to carry out a full econometric review of JobPath later this year when participant numbers will have reached a level to support such an evaluation.

The Department has recently published the JobPath Performance Data Report for the period July – September 2015, the results of which have been very positive. The report is available on the Departments website at http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath-performance-report-January-2017.pdf.

The Department intends to publish similar performance reports for each successive quarter as jobseekers complete their 12 month engagement period.

In addition to the above, the Department carries out regular on-site inspections to ensure that JobPath is delivered in accordance with contractual obligations. To date, 29 on-site inspections have been carried out at provider locations around the country.

The Department also commissions customer satisfaction research, which provides a qualitative evaluation of the standard of service delivery provided by the Jobpath providers.

To date one such survey has been conducted and the results are included in the published material referred to above.

Social Welfare Schemes

521. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expand the level of dental services available in view of the concerns of dental care professionals regarding the levels of oral health (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13485/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As announced in Budget 2017, I am pleased to confirm that access to the dental and optical benefit schemes will be extended to the self-employed from March and that certain treatments will be re-introduced to the Dental and Optical schemes later this year.

The dental scheme will have an annual scale and polish treatment and protracted periodontal treatment, where this is clinically required, re-introduced from October 2017. These treatments will be made available in addition to the current annual dental examination to all qualified persons, employed and self-employed. The re-introduction of these treatments addresses the concerns of dental care professionals and will make an important contribution to improving the oral health of the adult population.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If you require any further assistance with this query please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

522. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a reply to a lone parent application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13527/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): An application for One Parent Family Payment (OFP) dated 23rd February 2017 was received from the person concerned on 9th March 2017. A letter dated 9th March 2017 issued to the client requesting copy of bank statement and details of maintenance payments.

On receipt of this information a decision will be made on the OFP application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If you require any further assistance with this query, please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Carer's Allowance Applications

523. **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. [13549/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 1 March 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

524. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal on a decision on carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13557/17]

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 6th March 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

525. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13569/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 6 February 2017. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Data

526. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost per annum of extending entitlement to child benefit up to a person reaching their 19th birthday provided they are still in secondary education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13571/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 627,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

The current estimated annual cost of extending the upper age limit for payment for those persons reaching their 19th birthday and in secondary school, based on figures from the Department of Education and Skills, is over €62 million. It is important to note that this costing will change based on the number of 18 year olds in second level education at a given point in time and will increase or decrease depending on student numbers.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

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 19 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.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

527. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a jobseeker's allowance payment will issue in the case of a person (detail supplied) who is awaiting payment for nine weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13575/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): An application for jobseeker's allowance in respect of the person concerned has been awarded and the first payment is available for collection at his nominated post office on 21 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

528. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a jobseeker's allowance payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied), who is awaiting their payment for a number of weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13579/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): An application for jobseeker's allowance in respect of the person concerned has been awarded and the first payment will be available for collection at his nominated post office on 21 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

529. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13620/17]

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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

530. **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. [13622/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 2 March 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

531. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the budget allocated to Seetec Ireland in each of the past three years, in tabular form; the total money budgeted for allocation for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13624/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): JobPath is a payment by results model and all initial costs are borne by the companies.

In 2015 payments to the JobPath companies amounted to €1.2m and in 2016, €25.2m.

It is not intended to publish the individual payments to the JobPath companies as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

The budget for 2017 is €65m. The actual expenditure will be determined by the number of people who engage with the service and the number of jobseekers who successfully obtain and sustain employment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

532. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of service users referred by his Department to Seetec in each of the past three years, in tabular form; the outcomes for each person, specifying the employment which was gained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13625/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. The service is delivered by two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua.

To date, some 42,025 jobseekers have started their engagement period with Seetec. The figures per year are shown in the table below -

Year	No. of Service Users
2015	2,794

Year	No. of Service Users
2016	33,155
2017	6,076
Total	42,025

The JobPath service was rolled out on a phased basis over the period mid-2015 to July 2016. The numbers referred initially were low but this has increased with over 82,000 customers who have commenced with the service by March 2017. It will take time to accumulate data on a sufficient number of clients who have completed their engagement period with the service for complete and robust outcome data to be available.

However for 2017, my Department is publishing a report on the performance of the service on a quarterly basis. The first report was published on the 17th January. This report provided outcome figures such as job starts and 13 week job sustainment fees in respect of the first 1,266 jobseekers referred to the service during the period July – September 2015. It is not intended to publish the outcomes for each contractor separately at this time, as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

The initial data on the impact of the service is encouraging. Employment outcome data shows that compared to people who did not take part in the service, people who availed of the service were 23% more likely to have started a job (as of October 2016). The difference appears to be more marked for very long-term unemployed people, with those out of work for more than three years some 44% more likely to have found a job if they engaged with the service.

The first report is available on the department's website at http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath-performance-report-January-2017.pdf.

The published data contains a range of information which may assist the Deputy in gaining an overview of the performance of the service to date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

533. **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. [13632/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): As previously outlined to the Deputy 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 documentation 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.

Invalidity Pension Applications

534. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for an invalidity pension for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13635/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of her claim the lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 19 January 2017. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 30 March 2017. Any arrears due from 19 January 2017 to 29 March 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 15 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

535. **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. [13641/17]

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 23rd January 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified to the applicant as soon as possible. It is currently taking up to 14 weeks from date of receipt to process an application for DCA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

536. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) who has lodged an appeal against a decision to grant them a disability allowance will have the appeal decided; the reason for the delay with the appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13646/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a successful review, the man has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 16 November 2016. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 5 April 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.

Occupational Injuries Benefit Appeals

537. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an injury benefit application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13652/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Injury Benefit is payable in respect of incapacity for work due to an accident arising out of and in the course of employment. For the purposes of the scheme an accident while on an unbroken journey between one's normal place of residence and one's place of employment is regarded as an accident at work.

Injury Benefit was claimed on the basis that the accident happened while travelling from work. However, on examination of the case, a Deciding Officer held that the accident did not come within the scope of the regulations governing the Injury Benefit scheme as the injury occurred neither at the place of employment nor on a journey to or from the place of employment. The claim was therefore disallowed. This decision was upheld by the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office, following an appeal by the customer.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Payments

538. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal had their partial capacity benefit reduced despite having supplied his Department with a signed declaration as evidence of their child dependant continuing in third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13664/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a scheme which allows a person, who may not have full capacity for work, return to employment and continue to receive a payment from my Department. Under the scheme increases are payable in respect of qualified children up to the age of eighteen.

These increases can be paid up to the age of twenty two where evidence is shown that the child is in full-time education. The person concerned is in receipt of PCB and has three children, two of whom are aged over eighteen.

Payment of a child dependant increase in respect of one child over eighteen was restored on 1 February 2017 when evidence of continuing attendance at a third level course was received by the Department. Arrears from 16 September 2016 to 25 January 2017 were paid at that time.

Another child reached eighteen years of age on 12 January 2017 and, following receipt of evidence that the child was still in full-time education, payment of the child dependant increase in respect of this child was restored on 14 March 2017 with arrears from 12 January 2017 to 8 March 2017 paid at that time.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

539. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry was refused disability allowance; if their case is open for further medical evidence to be submitted for consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13668/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 8 September 2015.

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 November 2015 and of her rights of review and appeal. No request for review or appeal was received.

If the person in question believes they may qualify, it is open to her to reapply by completing and submitting to the Department the relevant application form (DA1).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 540 answered with Question No. 508.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

541. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person registered with Turas Nua cannot take part in a community employment scheme which could lead to full-time employment; if so, the reason for this rule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13742/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The activation supports and services which are available to those who are long-term unemployed include the JobPath employment activation service and work experience and training schemes such as Community Employment (CE) and TÚS.

The JobPath service procured by my Department provides additional resources to enable it to provide a high quality, case-managed employment support service for people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

The aim of the JobPath service is to assist participants in finding sustainable full-time paid employment by providing intensive individual support and assistance. It is distinct from the Community Employment scheme which provides part-time employment and training opportunities in local communities for people on a range of Social Welfare payments including long-term unemployment payments as a stepping stone back to employment. I should emphasise that Community Employment does not, nor is it intended to, provide full-time sustainable employment.

Jobseekers can only participate with one activation scheme or service at a time; this is to ensure that the best use is made of the available places and to allow the scheme and service providers time to work with the participants. However, people who on the date of their referral to JobPath have a written offer with a start date within four weeks for CE will be facilitated to take up their placement.

The referral period for the JobPath service is typically for a year. At the end of the 52 weeks, Jobseekers who have not been successful in finding suitable employment may, subject to an assessment by an Intreo case officer, apply for other activation supports such as CE.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Appeals

542. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a carer's benefit appeal by a person (details supplied); when the appeal was registered; the date the relevant departmental papers and the comments by or on behalf of the deciding officer were

sought; the date they were received; when this appeal will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13745/17]

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, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

543. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the first date when a person (details supplied) was allowed rent supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13748/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The client concerned was first awarded rent supplement on 8th April 1999 and remained in payment until May 2016.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

544. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13756/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Illness Benefit is payable in respect of incapacity for work due to illness.

The person concerned was in receipt of Illness Benefit from 24 November 2014 to 7 July 2015. It came to the Department's attention that the qualifying conditions for receipt of the benefit were not satisfied for some of this period. An overpayment was therefore assessed and a letter informing the person of the position was issued on 9 July 2015. To effect recovery of the overpayment some deductions were made from a subsequent illness benefit claim which the person concerned had during the period from 28 December 2015 to 2 April 2016. Where overpayments occur it is departmental policy to seek recovery, where possible.

There is a disablement benefit claim currently in payment but no deductions have been made from this payment.

It has been decided to carry out a full review of this person's case and, when completed, the person concerned will be notified of the position.

I trust that this explains the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

545. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the figure he gave to Dáil Éireann on 7 March 2017, estimating the cost of reverting to the State pension rate bands that existed prior to the changes introduced in 2012 of approximately €60 million if introduced in January 2018, included the increase in the State pension rate in 2017; and, if not, if he will provide an updated figure. [13773/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy should note that it is very difficult to calculate the figure requested with accuracy. While it is relatively easy to estimate the potential increases in existing State Pension (contributory) payments, it is likely that there would also be costs arising from people who are currently on other payments (such as the State pension (non-contributory) or Increases for Qualified Adults) as a rate band change could see them qualify for a higher rate of contributory pension. The extent of that additional cost is not easy to ascertain as the people concerned may not have made a claim for a contributory pension, and their individual entitlements would not, in many cases, become clear until they made such a claim.

The reply given in the answer referenced by the Deputy stated "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."

I am informed that the calculations which arrived at this figure were done in advance of the Budget changes. However, if one were to apply the recent rate increases to this figure on a *pro rata* basis, it would increase the estimated cost to "over €61.3 million", and I believe it would be conventional to still refer to such an estimate as "over €60 million".

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

546. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans in place to centralise the operation of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and the Citizens Information Service; the reason for this change; his views on concerns in relation to such a merger over fears that a number of offices will close; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13779/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): At the outset it is important to note that the Citizens Information Board (CIB) assures me that there will be no job losses, no closure of services, no change to service delivery locations and no change to the terms and conditions of serving staff during the lifetime of the restructuring programme. Most importantly, there will be no disruption to CIS and MABS services for those who use them.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB), which has statutory responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the Citizens Information Services (CIS), decided on 15th February 2017 to restructure the governance arrangements of these services. The decision comes after a lengthy and extensive analysis of options and a detailed consultation period with all stakeholders on the need for a more streamlined governance model. The decision was communicated by the Board to all CIS and MABS Boards and to all staff on 15th February 2017.

It is worth clarifying that the new governance arrangements are not aimed at centralising the services provided by CIS and MABS. The decision taken will simply reduce the number of individual local CIS and MABS company boards from ninety three (93) to sixteen (16). A

new regional board structure will be put in place which will comprise eight (8) CIS boards and eight (8) MABS boards.

The restructured governance arrangements being implemented at local company board level only will bring the CIS and MABS organisations more into line with modern public service governance guidelines and requirements where significant State funding is involved. In 2017, CIB is set to receive State funding of €54 million, of which €15 million is allocated to CIS services (including €13.1 million to the 42 local Citizens Information Services, €1.2 million to Citizens Information Phone services and, the balance, €0.7 million to central and other supports), and €24.6 million is allocated to the network of MABS services (including €15.4 million to the 51 local MABS, €0.3m to National Traveller MABS, €2.0 million to MABS National Development Company, €3.3million to the MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears initiative, €3.5 million to the Abhaile Scheme and the remainder €0.1m to MABS central supports).

A more streamlined governance structure will result in a more targeted use of valuable staff resources, redirected to increased front-line service delivery, made possible by reduction in the current significant administrative burden associated with maintaining ninety three (93) individual companies nationwide.

Following on from the decision of the Board, a Restructuring Implementation Group is being set up by CIB to examine all aspects of implementing the new sixteen (16) board model. This work will include examination of the establishment costs of the new structure and the potential for future savings derived from the reduction in the administrative burden associated with ninety three (93) individual local companies. Current costs are an aggregate of the costs incurred by each of the ninety three (93) local companies on items such as audit fees, professional fees (including legal services), payroll administration and board of director expenses. While cost is not the driver of the restructuring project, some efficiencies are likely to result from moving to a reduced sixteen (16) company model. The main aim of the project is to improve existing governance arrangements and optimise the benefits from operating a more modern, streamlined and customer focused service delivery model.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

547. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the carer's allowance section of his Department will send a file to the appeals office for a person (details supplied) who is appealing a decision made on their carer's allowance application. [13783/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As a result of an appeals officer's decision, the person concerned was awarded carer's allowance (CA) on 6 March 2017 for a 2nd care recipient. The first payment of CA at the higher rate of payment issued to her nominated post office on 16 March 2017.

Any arrears of allowance due from 26 May 2016 to 15 March 2017 will issue shortly.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

548. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will have a decision on a review of their carer's allowance. [13801/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) at a reduced rate of payment since 10 December 2013.

As her financial circumstances have changed from 30 September 2016 her claim was due for review.

The review has been completed and she has been awarded an increased rate of payment of CA from 6 October 2016. The first increased payment will issue on 23 March 2017 and on a weekly basis thereafter. Arrears from 6 October 2016 to 22 March 2017 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 15 March 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. Please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office if you need further assistance with this query.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

549. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider granting an extension to a person (details supplied) participating in a community employment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13806/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy may be aware Section 3.1.1 Eligible Applicants of the CE Procedures Manual provides that "With effect from 3rd April 2000, lifetime participation on Community Employment by an individual will be limited to 3 cumulative years (156 weeks) for persons under 55 years of age."

The participant concerned is under 55 year of age and is therefore only eligible to a maximum total of three years on CE. The participant commenced on CE on 17 March 2014. She completed three years on the CE Scheme on 10 March 2017. Her participation cannot be extended beyond this date as she has exhausted her available time on CE, as permitted under the CE Procedures Manual.

A Case Officer from the Department has written to the participant to invite her to meet with the case officer to discuss future career options.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

550. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of reinstating the full payment of €193 for those aged under 26 in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, supplementary welfare allowance and the back to education allowance. [13844/17]

560. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing family income supplement by 10%. [13855/17]

562. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the living alone allowance by €10 per month. [13857/17]

565. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing carer's allowance and carer's benefit by €3, €5 and €7. [13860/17]

572. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing disability allowance by €5, €10 and €20. [14033/17]

573. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the respite care grant by €100, €250 and €325. [14034/17]

574. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of extending the fuel allowance payment by three weeks and by five weeks. [14035/17]

577. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the blind pension payment by €2, €5 and €10. [14038/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 550, 560, 562, 565, 572 to 574, inclusive, and 577 together.

In Budget 2017, I was pleased to increase the rate of Back to Education Allowance for those on age-related reduced rates of payment to €193 per week. This change will come into effect from the academic year commencing in September. The cost of increasing the reduced weekly rates of €102.70 and €147.80, which are payable to recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance under 26 years of age, to the maximum rate of €193 per week is estimated at €117.4 million in a full year.

The cost of increasing Family Income Supplement by 10% is estimated at €42.2 million in a full year.

The cost of increasing the Living Alone Allowance by €10 per month (weekly equivalent of €2.31) is estimated at €23.6 million in a full year.

The full year cost of increasing Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit by €3, €5 and €7 per week is estimated at €8.5 million, €14.2 million and €19.9 million, respectively.

The full year cost of increasing Disability Allowance by €5, €10 and €20 per week is estimated at €35.1 million, €70.1 million and €140.3 million, respectively.

The full year cost of increasing the annual Carer's Support Grant by €100, €250 and €325 is estimated at €9.9 million, €24.6 million and €32.0 million, respectively.

The estimated full year cost of extending the duration of the fuel season by three weeks and five weeks is €26.4 million and €44 million, respectively.

The full year cost of increasing Blind Pension by €2, €5 and €10 week is estimated at €0.14 million, €0.35 million and €0.71 million, respectively.

These costs include the cost of proportionate increases for qualified adults, and those on reduced rates of payment, where applicable. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Departmental Contracts

551. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of exiting the JobPath contract early. [13845/17]

552. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year financial implications of ceasing to direct jobseekers to JobPath. [13846/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 551 and 552 together.

The JobPath contract contains provision for early termination notwithstanding any dispute which may arise and which is covered elsewhere in the contract.

Written notice must be served on the contractor 6 months in advance of a termination.

The amount of compensation to be paid to the providers is stipulated in the contract, however, this information is commercially sensitive and to publish same would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

The estimated budget for JobPath 2017 is €65m, the actual expenditure will depend on the number of referrals and the resulting number of clients who enter full employment, for which the contractor can claim a sustainment fee. This may represent a saving to the Exchequer but the saving will also be dependent on the cost of replacement services, as there is insufficient capacity immediately available to absorb the referrals that would have gone to JobPath.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Local Employment Service

553. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of an increase in funding required by the local employment service to facilitate a referral increase of 5%. [13847/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has contracted for the provision of Local Employment Service (LES) in 26 locations with 22 different contractors via a network of offices and outreach clinics.

Funding for the provision of the LES is not based on referral numbers, rather it is based on the ratio of clients per Mediator and the number of one to one meetings they are required to offer to each client. This ratio has been revised in recent contracts and currently stands at 120 clients per Mediator. This approach is in line with best practice and OECD benchmarks, which indicate that smaller caseloads are the key to the provision of this type of intensive support and assistance for jobseekers, particularly the long-term unemployed.

Total funding for the LES has been maintained at €20m annually since 2013.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

554. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of an additional 4,000, 5,000 and 10,000 community employment places. [13848/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Community Employment (CE) schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a range of social welfare payments.

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

The estimated full-year cost of an additional 4,000, 5,000 and 10,000 CE places, based on 2016 overall cost figures, would be as follows:

Community Employment Places	Full-year cost
4,000	€63.2m
5000	€79m
10,000	€158m

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

555. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of an additional 500 rural social scheme places. [13849/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The objective of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support for farmers and fishermen. All participants must be actively engaged in farming or fishing. As the Deputy is aware, I have allocated an additional 500 places on the RSS, commencing in 2017. This is the first increase in places since 2006 and will expand the overall number of participants from 2,600 to 3,100. 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.

The full year cost of an additional 500 RSS places, based on 2016 overall cost figures, is estimated at €8.5m.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme

556. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of restoring the back to school clothing and footwear allowance in full. [13850/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The BSCFA is not intended to meet the full cost of school clothing and footwear but to provide assistance towards these costs. The Government has provided €37.4 million for the scheme in 2017.

End of year records show that under the 2016 BSCFA scheme, payments were made to over 154,000 families in respect of some 283,000 children, of whom 166,000 were aged 4-11 years and 117,000 were aged 12 years and older. The rate of payment was €100 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and €200 for children over 12 years in second level education.

In 2011 rates of payment were €200 and €305. Using the number of children covered by the scheme in 2016 as a basis, the full-year additional cost to increase the BSCFA to the 2011 rates

would be €28.9 million. Using the same basis, the additional cost to restore the 2012 payment rates, which were €150 and €250, would be approximately €14.2 million.

Changes to increase the rate of payment of any scheme administered by the Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

557. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of allowing lone parents in employment whose children are aged between seven and 14 to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and family income supplement if they meet the qualifying criteria. [13851/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) is available to lone parents (both former one-parent family payment recipients and new lone parents), who have a youngest child aged 7 to 13 years, inclusive. These customers are exempt from the jobseeker's allowance conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work.

While it is a condition of the JST scheme that recipients must continue to parent alone, this is not a qualifying condition of the family income supplement (FIS) and so this information is not maintained for FIS recipients. From the data currently available on household composition within the FIS scheme, it is not possible to determine which FIS recipients, who are also lone parents, would satisfy the eligibility criteria to qualify for a JST payment. It is therefore not possible to provide an accurate costing of extending the payment of FIS to JST recipients.

Budget 2017 contained several measures which benefited JST recipients. These included the 85% Christmas Bonus, which was paid to JST recipients in early December and the increase in the weekly earnings disregard for JST recipients from €90 to €110. This increase came into effect in early January 2017. JST recipients also benefited from the €5 weekly increase in social welfare payments which took effect earlier this month.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

558. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of making jobseeker's transitional payment and the SUSI grant payable to lone parents regardless of the age of the youngest child or whether the family is in receipt of rent supplement. [13852/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Lone parents who wish to undertake a full-time third level education course can continue to receive income support from my Department irrespective of the age of the youngest child or whether or not they are in receipt of rent supplement.

For those lone parents in receipt of the Jobseeker's Transitional payment, without rent supplement, they may have access to both the SUSI maintenance grant and the SUSI free fees grant.

For those lone parents who are in receipt of rent supplement and who wish to undertake a full-time course, they must transition to the Back to Education Allowance to continue receiv-

ing their income support from my Department. These lone parents may also be eligible for the SUSI free fees grant. However, they are not eligible for the SUSI maintenance grant in accordance with SUSI eligibility rules, which fall under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

Any changes to the rules of eligibility to the SUSI maintenance grant are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills. The estimated cost of paying the SUSI maintenance grant to a lone parent, irrespective of the age of the youngest child and whether or not they are in receipt of housing support, is therefore a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Child Benefit Data

559. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing child benefit by €3, €5 and €10 for children aged 12 and over. [13853/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability.

Child Benefit is currently paid to around 627,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure in the order of over €2 billion in 2017.

The estimated annual costs of increasing Child Benefit by €3, €5 and €10 for children aged 12 and over is as follows:-

€3 increase: €13.4 million

€5 increase: €22.4 million

€10 increase: €44.8 million.

A targeted increase to children aged 12 years and over, while welcome to families with children in this category, would possibly create an expectation of a similar rate increase to families with younger children under 12 years.

Furthermore, from an operational perspective significant administrative resources would be required as in effect a two-tier system is being introduced, which is not possible to cost or estimate accurately at present.

Any changes to the eligibility criteria for Child Benefit have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Questions No. 560 answered with Question No. 550.

One-Parent Family Payment Expenditure

561. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of raising the cut-off age of the one-parent family payment to 12 years and increase the earnings disregard to €120. [13856/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information that the Deputy has requested is currently not available in my Department. Given the complex nature of the request, my Department will provide the information directly to the Deputy in due course.

Question No. 562 answered with Question No. 550.

State Pensions

563. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of restoring the State pension band rates to their pre -September 2012 position. [13858/17]

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 is approximately €7 billion per annum. Due to demographic changes, my Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year at an approximate rate of €1 billion every 5 years. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced. These bands replaced the previous structure, introduced in 2000. They more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person, and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions, subject to the safety nets in place for those with no other means.

Entitlement is banded based on the average yearly contributions made during a working life. Those with a yearly average of 48+ contributions receive a 100% pension, where, for example, those with only a yearly average of 20 contributions receive an 85% pension (not means-tested).

It is estimated that reverting the contributory pension rate bands, to the percentages effective from 2000-2012, would cost over €60 million next year, and this annual cost would rise at a rate of approximately €10 million per annum. If such a change was introduced, it would mainly benefit pensioners with additional income above the State pension, and not those solely dependent upon it. It would also significantly reduce the funds available for across-the-board pension increases, which were instead introduced in the 2016 and 2017 Budgets, and which benefit all pensioners, including those most at risk of poverty.

Reforms and increases in the pension age have safeguarded the pension system and its core rates, despite huge demographic pressures and the economic crisis. By achieving this, even in such difficult circumstances, the Government has shown its commitment to supporting older people, as evidenced by CSO figures which show pensioners far less likely to experience consistent poverty than the general population.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension there are supports available in the overall State pension system which assists qualification for a contributory payment, based on factors such as the contributions made by their spouse, and/or other factors likely to impact upon their needs. These include:

- The Homemaker's scheme, which was introduced to make qualification for State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties.

- Widows generally qualify for a full-rate Widows Contributory Pension.

- Increases for Qualified Adults.

- Credits for periods of unemployment and illness.

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 €227 (over 95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Expenditure

564. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of extending the family income supplement payment to those engaged on job activation schemes. [13859/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support, which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. FIS is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are currently over 57,000 families with more than 126,000 children in receipt of FIS. The estimated spend on FIS this year is approximately €422 million.

To qualify for FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount, which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

My Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers. These supports include employment schemes such as Community Employment (CE), Tús, and Gateway. These schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping stone back to employment. The objective of these schemes is to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities to return to the labour market. It is possible for a household to receive a FIS payment where the spouse or partner of the FIS applicant is engaged on one of these schemes. However, to pay FIS directly to someone who is participating in one of these schemes would reduce the incentive for that person to move off a supported employment programme and into full-time remunerative employment.

Research from the ESRI shows that people are better off in work, the results, based on an analysis of current incomes, benefits and taxes, suggest that more than eight out of ten of these unemployed jobseekers would see their income increase by at least 40 per cent upon taking up employment. FIS helps recipients to gain a firm foothold in work and build a better future for their families.

My Department does not have definitive up-to-date data on the household income relating to the households on the various job activation schemes. Therefore it has no way of predicting with any accuracy the potential additional estimated full year cost of extending the family income supplement payment to those engaged on job activation schemes.

Finally, any changes to the FIS scheme would have to be considered in an overall Budgetary context.

Question No. 565 answered with Question No. 550.

Household Benefits Scheme

566. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of reinstating the household benefits package in full. [13875/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The household benefits package comprises the electricity/gas allowance (€35 per month) and the free television licence scheme (€160 per annum). At present, it is paid to some 425,000 customers, with expenditure estimated at €232 million for 2017.

There has been no reduction in the household benefits scheme in recent budgets. However, there were considerable changes in the scheme in previous years, not just in terms of the various levels of benefits that have been made available under the scheme at different points in time, but also the basis upon which they are paid, e.g., whether they are a payment for units or a cash payment.

The cost, therefore, would depend on a number of factors, including whether all of these changes would be reversed, the particular levels of benefit which would be restored, whether there would be an adjustment for inflation, the increased claim load among those who qualify, and take-up for the various benefits.

In Budget 2011 the number of free units provided under the electricity and gas allowance was reduced to the level at the start of 2007 (from 2,400 to 1,800). This change was effective from September 2011. In Budget 2013 the electricity allowance was restructured and is now based on the average best rate (minus the PSO) available for 150 units per month from Electric Ireland, Bord Gáis Éireann and Airtricity which resulted in electricity and gas allowances rate of €35 per month or €420 a year. Based on a rate of 2,400 units a year this could give a rate of €560 a year.

In August 2007 the value of the telephone allowance was increased with general price increases from €296 per annum to €310.80 per annum. Following a number of reductions in the rate, the telephone allowance element of the household benefits scheme was discontinued in 2014. At the time it was discontinued 77 per cent of people receiving household benefits were receiving the telephone allowance.

It is estimated that restoring both these benefits to their earlier levels would be likely to cost in the region of €160-€190 million in a full year.

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. Over the past two Budgets, the maximum weekly rate for State Pensions has increased by €8 per week, which is the equivalent of nearly €35 per month. This has increased the personal rate of the non-contributory pension to €227, and that of the contributory pension to €238.30. There was also a €2.50 increase in the rate of the Fuel Allowance last year, from €20 to €22.50 per week. It is worth noting that the value of these increases is in excess of the value of the household benefits previously provided.

Any decision to increase the benefits under the household benefits package would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations. On the occasion of the most recent budgets, the Government has chosen to concentrate resources on increasing the rate of the pension and other weekly payments.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Care Provision

567. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will assess the feasibility and costs for the provision of a nationwide database that would co-ordinate services providers, both public bodies and community organisations, that provide community services, most especially for the care of the old and vulnerable, in order to properly identify and inform on persons who need help, the help that is required and the body which can and will provide that help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13910/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive (HSE) provides a wide range of services for people growing older in Ireland and is committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of older people, their dignity, diversity and independence.

The specific issue raised in your parliamentary question concerning services for older people and persons deemed as vulnerable would appear to be more appropriate for my colleague, the Minister for Health and also for the HSE.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Activation Projects

568. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can be released from their obligations to Turas Nua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13912/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): All jobseekers referred to JobPath must have been registered as unemployed and available for work for at least 12 months. Participation with the JobPath service is mandatory as is the case for the activation services provided for jobseekers by Intreo and the Local Employment Services

I understand that the customer has not yet informed my Department regarding his ill health and I have asked my officials to contact the customer to discuss his options.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

569. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if disability benefit will be approved for a person (details supplied). [13914/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by my Department on 1 February 2017.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 570 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Data

571. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the hours carers can study or work while in receipt of social welfare from 15 to 20 hours per week. [14032/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Entitlement to a Carer's Allowance means that a person must be living with, or in a position to provide full-time care and attention to a person in need of care who does not normally live in an institution and not be engaged in employment, self-employment, training or education courses outside the home for more than 15 hours a week. During such an absence, adequate care for the person requiring full-time care and attention must be arranged. Similar conditions apply in the case of Carer's Benefit.

Carer's benefit and carer's allowance are demand-led schemes and increasing the number of hours a carer can work from 15 hours to 20 hours per week, while continuing to be regarded as providing full-time care and attention, would be expected to increase the demand for these payments and lead to additional programme costs.

It is not feasible, based on the information currently available to my Department, to provide a reliable estimate of the additional numbers of workers and students that would qualify for carer's income supports consequent on such an increase particularly when account is taken of the fact that changing such conditions might themselves have an impact on decisions at individual household level.

My Department will consider how best it could improve the robustness and reliability of estimates around such change as part of the overall budgetary process.

I hope that this answers the Deputy's question.

Questions Nos. 572 to 574, inclusive, answered with Question No. 550.

Bereavement Grant

575. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of introducing a bereavement grant of €500, €700 and €1,000. [14036/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In recent Budgets my Department has protected primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving. This allowed my Department to protect other social welfare payments such as the State pension.

There are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include a weekly-paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government

increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection 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 from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional and urgent needs payments in 2017.

The number of bereavement grant claims in 2013 was 23,716, and this represented a percentage increase on 2012 figure of approximately 4%. Based on a similar yearly increase each year since 2013, it is estimated that the number of bereavement grant claims that might arise in 2018, were the scheme to be reintroduced, would be in the region of 28,858, and this number would likely increase in future years. The following table sets out the estimated cost of introducing a bereavement grant at a rate of €500, €700 and €1000.

Estimate cost of introducing a Bereavement Grant in 2018

Amount	Estimated number of grants to be paid	Cost per annum
€500	28,858	€14.43 million
€700	28,858	€20.2 million
€1000	28,858	€28.86 million

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

576. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of reinstating the State pension transition payment. [14037/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years, which is the current State pension age. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to the new State pension age. Where this is not possible, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

Reversing this measure would have a significant Exchequer cost. In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension. However, it is anticipated that well over half of the gross cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have

been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million, and this is expected to increase over time. The cost of reversing this decision would depend, therefore, on the effective date of such a measure, and also on any resultant changes in behaviour.

Each year more people are living to pension age and living longer in retirement. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by close to €1 billion every 5 years. The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

The Deputy should note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Question No. 577 answered with Question No. 550.

Fuel Allowance Expenditure

578. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of increasing the fuel allowance payment by €3 and €5. [14039/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to 378,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €229 million in 2017. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. It represents a contribution towards those costs and is not intended to meet them in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance as part of the household benefits package to approximately 425,000 customers, at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017.

Given the 2017 estimated cost of fuel allowance is €229 million based on a weekly fuel allowance rate of €22.50, the estimated cost of increasing the fuel allowance by €3 a week to €25.50 would be €30.5 million and of increasing it by €5 a week to €27.50 would be €50.9 million.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Data

579. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 260 of 23 February 2017, if he will provide details with regard to the five members of staff currently suspended in his Department, in tabular form (details supplied). [14057/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The details of the 5 members of staff of my Department currently suspended with pay pending the completion of the disciplinary investigation process are as follows.

-	Grade	Salary Point	Suspended From	Reason for Suspension	Date Investigation commenced	Expected date of completion of investigation
1.	HEO	€57,246	August 2012	Alleged Fraud	See below	Unknown
2.	HEO	€57,246	October 2012	Alleged Fraud	See below	Unknown
3.	EO	€44,187	June 2015	Alleged Inappropriate Behaviour	June 2015	Complete
4.	HEO	€55,415	September 2015	Alleged Inappropriate Behaviour	September 2015	Complete
5.	EO	€37,588	November 2015	Alleged Inappropriate Behaviour	November 2015	Pending

In relation to cases 1 and 2 above these are being dealt with by the Gardaí, who have requested that the Department delay action until completion of their investigations.

In relation to cases 3 and 4 above, the investigations are now complete and appropriate action is being taken in accordance with the Civil Service Disciplinary Code. In relation to case 5, the investigation is nearing completion, with the delay due to the absence of a key witness.

There is no cost associated with each of the investigations and no replacement salary costs are applicable for any of the members of staff. While the salary costs for each month of suspension are not available, the annual salary point applied to each staff is indicated in the table.

Departmental Surveys

580. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of the survey he has issued to a number of self-employed persons in relation to extending social welfare entitlements to the self-employed; the number of recipients of this survey; the way in which the participants were chosen to participate; the reason for sending this survey; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14099/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In August 2016, the Department of Social Protection conducted a survey of 20,022 people – largely self-employed workers including farmers, as well as certain company directors – who relied on Class S Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions to qualify for social insurance benefits in the tax year 2014.

The survey was undertaken to understand how the PRSI system is working for self-employed people, in order to inform consideration of possible changes to the system, in line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to "seek to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed".

The Statistics and Business Intelligence Unit of this Department conducted the survey in accordance with the principles of the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice. First, a stratified random sample of 20,022 people was generated from the population of people who paid PRSI contributions under Class S (and no other class) in 2014. These people were then surveyed via a postal questionnaire to elicit their views on the social insurance system as it applies to them, their satisfaction with its range of coverage, and their suggestions on how the range of benefits might be extended.

An analysis of the responses has been completed and is being reviewed prior to publication.

Departmental Legal Costs

581. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, who provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14138/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Legal advice and services are provided to the Department by Legal Advisors who are seconded to the Department from the Office of the Attorney General. That Office, together with the Chief State Solicitors Office, determines if, and procures and pays for, any external legal advice that may be required and incurs any expenditure arising.

Carer's Allowance Applications

582. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14158/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 10 March 2017 and the first payment issued to their nominated bank account on 15 March 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 5 January 2017 to 14 March 2017 have also issued to the bank.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 10 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 583 withdrawn.

Community Services Programme

584. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a community

group (details supplied) can expect to receive a response from Pobal to correspondence it sent to the body in which it queries the funding options available for the appointment of a project administrator through the community services programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14197/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The community services programme (CSP) is designed to address gaps in the delivery of key local services, to tackle disadvantage and to ensure that community facilities are utilised. It provides valuable resourcing for service delivery undertaken by not-for-profit companies and co-operatives in communities around the country.

This group referred to by the Deputy is not currently in receipt of funding under CSP. The first step for this group is to submit an expression of interest. To this end, an expression of interest document and guidance note to assist in its completion has been e-mailed to the group.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Ministerial Allowances

585. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14569/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There were no overnight expenses claimed by any Minister or Minister of State in my Department for staying in Dublin for the period 2011 to date.

The Minister's and the Minister of State's expenses are available on the Department's website at www.welfare.ie.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

586. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding contributions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12808/17]

587. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans in reaching the recommended target of 0.7% GDP towards poverty overseas aid in view of the current figure Ireland contributes which stands at 0.36%; his further plans on working towards meeting this target; when he plans to meet this target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13259/17]

604. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount Ireland spent on overseas development assistance in each of the years 2007 to 2016; and the percentage of gross national product the spend represents in each year. [14112/17]

605. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount he expects Ireland to spend on overseas development assistance in 2017; and the percentage of gross national product he expects this spend to be. [14113/17]

606. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount he expects Ireland to spend on overseas development assistance in 2018; and the percentage of

gross national product he expects this spend to be. [14114/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 586, 587 and 604 to 606, inclusive, together.

The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy for international development, "One World, One Future", clearly articulates our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) in Official Development Assistance (ODA), as economic conditions allow.

In the Programme for Government we have set out our ambition to make progress towards the UN target as resources permit. Progress needs to be made in a sustainable and manageable way, which continues to strengthen Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in providing humanitarian assistance and contributing to the fight to end global poverty and hunger.

In the very difficult economic circumstances of recent years, the Government managed to stabilise and largely protect allocations to ODA. Since 2011 we have made annual contributions in excess of €600 million and have cumulatively allocated over €4.5 billion in the period 2011 to 2017. This represents a remarkable commitment of public funds towards the fight to eradicate global hunger, reduce extreme poverty and provide humanitarian assistance to some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Over the past two years we have managed to increase funding allocations for ODA, providing an increase of €40 million in 2016 and a further €10 million for 2017. The total 2017 allocation for ODA will be €651 million.

Based on current Department of Finance forecasts for GNP we anticipate the ODA/GNP percentage outturn for 2016 will be at least 0.3%. However provisional preliminary figures show the outturn will surpass this level. For 2017 we are forecasting an ODA / GNP percentage level of at least 0.3%.

Ireland's ODA contributions, together with the ODA/GNP percentage delivered for years 2007 through to 2016 are set out in the following table:

-	-	Total ODA €m	ODA as a % of GNP
Budget	2016	641.04	0.30% **
Outturn	2015	647.51	0.36%
	2014	614.86	0.38%
	2013	637.09	0.46%
	2012	628.90	0.47%
	2011	657.04	0.50%
	2010	675.83	0.51%
	2009	722.20	0.54%
	2008	920.66	0.59%
	2007	870.87	0.53%

** Estimated based on Department of Finance Budget day Forecasts of GNP 2016.

We have not yet commenced the 2018 budget process. Final allocations to ODA, as with all public expenditure, will be a matter for Government, and will be set in the context of available resources and the competing budgetary demands we face. I and the Minister for Foreign Affairs

and Trade, will be making the strongest possible case for an increase in the ODA for next year.

US Executive Order

588. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12963/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I delivered a comprehensive statement on the matters referred to in this question to the House on 15 February, 2017. A copy of my statement to the House on that date is set out below for reference. **Statement on behalf of the Government:**

US Executive Order (27 January, 2017) by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Ceann Comhairle,

Executive Order of 27 January 2017

I wish to address the House with regard to the matter of the Executive Order signed by President Donald J. Trump on 27 January, 2017.

In particular, I wish to make clear the Government's position on the following three issues: this Executive Order; the operation of pre-clearance facilities at both Dublin and Shannon Airports; and Ireland's relationship with the United States.

The Government's position on this matter is clear and was set out in my Press Statement on 29 January, 2017, immediately prior to my visit to Washington, DC, from 31 January to 2 February. As I noted in that statement, while US immigration policy is a matter for the US authorities, it is clear that the Executive Order signed by President Trump on 27 January last could have far-reaching implications, both on humanitarian grounds and for relations between the United States and the global Muslim community. I would further note that the Government fully shares the concerns expressed by other EU partners regarding this development.

Alongside these concerns, a question arose about the possible effects on dual nationals. On 31 January 2017, the US authorities issued a clarification which was also publicised by the US Embassy in Dublin. This noted that the Executive Order in question does not restrict the travel of dual nationals to the United States, so long as they hold the passport of an unrestricted country and possess a valid US visa, if required.

That means that Irish citizens travelling to the United States on Irish passports should encounter no difficulties in this regard, as long as they have followed the relevant procedures governing the US Visa Waiver Programme and, if necessary, have obtained a US visa prior to travel.

I wish to underline that Irish citizens, who are dual nationals of one of the seven states listed in the Executive Order signed on 27 January last, have the same rights to avail of the US Visa Waiver Programme as all other Irish citizens. A total of 5,003 certificates of naturalisation were issued in the period 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2016 to citizens of the seven states concerned. Around 8,000 current Irish passport holders were born in one of these seven countries.

As the House will be aware, I travelled to the United States from 31 January to 2 February 2017, as part of a pre-planned visit to Washington, DC. I had a number of meetings with several Congressional leaders from both sides of the aisle – that is, both Republican and Democrat – including the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Paul Ryan; House Majority Leader,

Mr Kevin McCarthy; and House Minority Leader Ms. Nancy Pelosi.

I also travelled to the White House where I met with representatives of the US Administration, including the Former US National Security Advisor – Gen. Michael Flynn. During my meeting with Gen. Flynn I expressed the Government's deep concerns with regard to the nature and impact of the Executive Order of 27 January. In response, Gen. Flynn outlined the rationale, in US immigration terms, for these temporary measures. I also pointed out to Gen. Flynn the damaging consequences of these measures in humanitarian terms, as well as the impact on the international reputation of the United States. I reiterated those views and concerns at my various meetings on Capitol Hill.

As the House will no doubt be aware, in recent days the US courts have intervened and imposed a temporary suspension on the implementation of the Executive Order of 27 January. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on a matter which is still the subject of legal proceedings.

Pre-clearance at Dublin and Shannon Airports

In the context of discussions about the Executive Order in Ireland, the issue of Pre-Clearance facilities at both Dublin and Shannon Airports arose. The matter was discussed at Cabinet and the Taoiseach has already requested that a review of preclearance be carried out. This review – which is being chaired by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport – involves officials from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Justice and Equality, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I understand that this review is very close to completion.

However, I would like to clarify the facts regarding a number of questions that arose about Pre-Clearance facilities. The US-Ireland Pre-clearance Agreement was signed by the Minister for Transport and the Secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security on 17 November, 2008 and given effect in Irish law on 8 July, 2009 by the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009 (No. 16 of 2009).

The US-Ireland Pre-clearance Agreement states that nothing therein diminishes the rights enjoyed by individuals under the Constitution and laws of Ireland or, where applicable, the United States of America. It expressly states that the pre-clearance facility is within Irish jurisdiction and that the laws of Ireland apply at all times.

US pre-clearance officers are not considered law enforcement officers. The only law enforcement officers at Irish airports are members of An Garda Siochána and Customs Officers. From an operational perspective, facilities are provided to the US Border and Customs staff to operate the facility and normal Garda assistance is available to passengers and US staff in these areas.

Passengers who wish to avail of pre-clearance do so on condition that they recognise and consent to the right of the US to grant or refuse pre-clearance in accordance with its laws. Passengers present voluntarily for pre-clearance and avail of the facility on a consensual basis. Until their flights depart, passengers remain in Irish legal jurisdiction and have the right to withdraw from the pre-clearance process at any time.

If an individual is refused leave to board, they revert to the Garda immigration officer and are considered in the same manner as if they had presented at the frontier of the State seeking permission to enter. Each case is examined on its individual merits, in accordance with Irish law. The existence of pre-clearance facilities therefore has no effect on the capacity of persons to claim asylum in Ireland nor on the way that such individuals are treated.

I would like to remind the House that pre-clearance of flights from Dublin or Shannon

bound for destinations in the United States is not compulsory. Air carriers choose to apply to have their services pre-cleared in either Dublin or Shannon.

It is important to have clear factual information about Pre-Clearance in the public domain given its considerable benefits for Ireland. Shannon Airport was the first airport in the world outside the Americas to offer a US pre-clearance facility. Over 204,000 passengers used the pre-clearance facility at Shannon in 2016. Pre-clearance is a major selling point with the airport's business and tourism customers, supporting trans-Atlantic connectivity for its catchment area along the entire Western-seaboard: from Donegal to Kerry and also serving the Midland counties.

During 2016, almost 1.2 million passengers used the pre-clearance facility at Dublin Airport. Dublin Airport has seen continuous growth in trans-Atlantic flights since the commencement of pre-clearance in 2011. Pre-clearance has been a key driver of transfer growth at Dublin Airport. Dublin Airport is the fifth busiest airport for connectivity to North America in Europe, behind Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt and Schiphol.

The availability of pre-clearance facilities at both Dublin and Shannon Airports is a key component of Ireland's continued competitiveness in attracting US foreign direct investment, and Ireland's position as a gateway to the wider EU single market.

It is worth noting in this context that the US is currently expanding the pre-clearance programme, with 10 airports short-listed as potential sites.

Relations between Ireland and the United States

Ceann Comhairle, I might make a few remarks regarding the relationship between Ireland and the United States.

The Government's priority is to ensure that the long standing and warm relationship between Ireland and the US is protected in the interests of Irish citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. Our relationship is complex and multi-layered, is based on shared values, as well as our deep political, historic and economic ties.

In economic terms alone over 150,000 people are directly employed in over 700 US firms in Ireland and that these account for over 74 % of all IDA supported employment. In addition, Irish companies directly employ over 120,000 people in 227 companies at over 2,600 locations, in all 50 States across the USA. US firms in Ireland form a critical part of Ireland's cutting edge, internationally traded goods and services economy in industries such as information & communications technology, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medical technologies and financial services.

As a government we have a responsibility to protect and advance the interests of our country and our people. As the House will be aware, the Taoiseach was the first EU Head of State or Government to speak with then President-elect Trump immediately following his election on 8 November last. The Taoiseach also spoke with then Vice-President-elect Pence – who has strong links with Ireland. Separately, I spoke with Mr Paul Ryan, following his re-confirmation as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Following the US Presidential elections, there was some public debate about St. Patrick's Day events, specifically in Washington DC. Collectively, the St. Patrick's Day events in Washington provide invaluable opportunities for the Government to discuss, at the very highest levels with the US Administration, our priorities and concerns. It is also an opportunity to inform the new Administration and Congress of issues of Irish interest, including immigration reform and the Peace Process, and to reaffirm our longstanding relationship, based on shared values of

democracy and the rule of law, as well as economic and historic ties.

St. Patrick's Day offers the Government the opportunity – in a spirit of honest friendship – to raise our concerns with the United States' Administration, as well as to honour the long-standing relationship between our two countries and peoples. The tradition dates back several decades, and has facilitated contact with both Republican and Democrat Administrations. It is a key date each year in our multi-faceted bilateral relations.

President Trump, Vice-President Pence and Speaker Ryan have all indicated that they would wish to continue with the tradition of marking St. Patrick's Day in Washington, DC.

As I have already noted, I visited Washington, DC, from 31 January to 2 February last and met, among others, Speaker Paul Ryan, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, as well as a large number of members of Congress and representatives of the Administration. Our on-going engagement with US political leaders – from both sides of the aisle – is essential in advocating issues of interest or concern to the Irish people and I would like to publicly thank the Congressional Friends of Ireland for their commitment to our country.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I am acutely conscious of the challenges facing the undocumented Irish in the United States. Achieving relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US and agreement on a facility for future migration between Ireland and the US are long-standing Government objectives. The undocumented Irish in the United States are believed to number around 50,000 individuals, spread across the US.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has and will continue to seek practical, beneficial solutions to the plight of the undocumented Irish. The Government will also continue to support organisations that deliver frontline advisory services and community care to Irish emigrants through the Emigrant Support Programme, which is overseen by Minister of State McHugh, Minister of State for the Diaspora.

Many emigrants to the United States achieve great success but many others can find themselves in vulnerable circumstances. More than 70% of the funds allocated through this programme are directed towards welfare services, including in support of the undocumented Irish in the U.S. In the last funding round for the Emigrant Support Programme, my Department was able to allocate more than € 2.3 million in funding to organisations in the United States. I have visited Immigration Centres and I know that that funding makes a valuable contribution to vulnerable Irish citizens far from home and far from family networks.

During my recent short visit to Washington, DC, I had an opportunity to be fully briefed by our Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Anne Anderson, and her colleagues at our Embassy on a range of issues of importance in our bilateral relations with the United States, including immigration reform. Indeed, my officials regularly update me on this priority issue for the Irish government, which my colleague Minister McHugh and I, along with all of our government colleagues, are dedicated to progressing.

Our Embassy in Washington and Consulates across the United States remain in active and ongoing contact with Irish immigration centres throughout the U.S. Ambassador Anderson hosted a meeting of stakeholders in the area of immigration at the Embassy on 12 January last for an exchange of views on how progress might best made in the new political context, and to underline the Government's continuing commitment to those working with Irish immigrants in the United States.

The bottom line is that it is only by continuing to engage with policy-makers in the US –

both in the Administration and in Congress, as well as at State and local level – that we can articulate our concerns and seek to advance the interests of Irish citizens. Whether it be with regard to the recent Executive Order or concerning the need for immigration reform. As a Government we are determined to use every opportunity to set out our priorities on a broad range of issues, in the interests of our people, and of the values which both Ireland and the US share.

Diaspora Issues

589. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps being taken in the diaspora policy to engage and support the Irish LGBT plus community abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12974/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): "*Global Irish*," Ireland's Diaspora policy, encompasses all Irish communities overseas. As this policy was launched two years ago the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently reviewing the implementation of the policy, and how we can better and more effectively implement the policy to the benefit of all our citizens and diaspora around the world. The stated vision of the Policy is for a "*vibrant, diverse Global Irish community, connected to Ireland and to each other* ." One of the means through which the Department supports this is through the Emigrant Support Programme. This Programme, established in 2004, has always been available for suitable projects addressing the needs of Irish communities abroad, including members of the Irish LGBTQI community abroad. In recent years the Emigrant Support Programme has through its funding supported LGBTQI projects in the USA and in Britain.

In 2016 the Presidential Distinguished Service Award was also awarded to New York based activists Brendan Fay and Kathleen Walsh D'Arcy for their work on LGBTQI community support. This Presidential Distinguished Service Award recognises the service given to this country or to Irish communities abroad by those who live outside Ireland. The Awards for Mr Fay and Ms Walsh D'Arcy marks the significance of their work in New York with the St. Pats For All parade and LGBTQI group Lavender and Green. I, along with the Taoiseach and the Minister for the Diaspora, was delighted to be there on the night when President Higgins made the presentation, and we are rightfully proud as a nation of their great work over many years.

My Department is currently preparing for the second Global Irish Civic Forum which will be an important opportunity for dialogue for Irish community organisations abroad, both with the Government and between themselves. I am pleased to hear from my officials in the Irish Abroad Unit that people representing the LGBTQI community both in the United States and in Britain have already registered to attend the upcoming Global Irish Civic Forum.

Similarly my officials in the Department's Consular Unit have been actively engaging with LGBTQI groups in Ireland to see how the Department can mainstream their concerns and needs into the Department's consular work. The Consular Unit and Irish Abroad Unit, which sit in the same Division, are liaising with each other on efforts to continue to support LGBTQI members of Ireland's diaspora and this is a welcome development.

My officials and Ireland's Missions around the world will continue to value, promote and support the vision of a vibrant, diverse and connected Global Irish community. The current review of the implementation of the Diaspora Policy seeks to improve how we do this and I would like to thank you for supporting and engaging with our efforts.

Visa Agreements

590. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a law passed by the Israeli Government which will ban entry of foreigners who call for the boycott of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13232/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Every country has of course the right to determine for itself the conditions for entry to its territory. Nonetheless I consider that the recent Israeli law on visa restrictions, which was strongly opposed by many parties in the Knesset, is deeply regrettable and unjust. It aims to exclude people on the basis of their having expressed non-violent political opinions, and is cast in the broadest and most general terms, which could apply to very large numbers of people. It is akin to earlier legislation which used the same broad definitions to make Israelis who advocated the same opinions liable for financial damages. This law, and other recent legislation in Israel, are deeply damaging to that country's international image, and reputation as a democracy. Close scrutiny will now be paid to how the law is operated in practice.

As well as the territory of Israel, Israel also *de facto* controls entry to the occupied Palestinian Territory, and it would be further unjust if persons are prevented from entering that territory on the basis of non-violent political opinions held about that occupation, and the behaviour and actions of the occupation authorities. I am already concerned that Israel is in practice more and more acting to exclude from Palestinian territory international aid and human rights workers, and even political observers, who seek to examine and document the operation of the occupation and the actions of the authorities. No military occupation should endure in the longer term, but if it is justly operated it should have nothing to hide.

Diplomatic Representation

591. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the fact that the US Administration has failed to name a new US Ambassador to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13233/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The appointment of Ambassadors by the United States is a matter for the US authorities, in accordance with the relevant US legal and constitutional provisions. Pending the nomination and confirmation – by the US President and Senate respectively - of a new US Ambassador to Ireland, we will continue to engage closely with the US Embassy in Dublin under the leadership of its designated Chargé d'Affaires. We look forward to the arrival of a new US Ambassador in due course.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

592. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13327/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are no State boards or agencies under the aegis of my Department so the issue raised by the Deputy does not arise.

Departmental Funding

593. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is an expenses grant to assist students who have been selected for a one week Iveagh scholarship with his Department as part of their transition year work experience at secondary school for accommodations and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13417/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Iveagh Scholars programme is an island-wide competition which offers Transition Year and Year 12 students the chance to spend a week at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This aims to encourage second-level students to consider Ireland's role in the world in an independent and creative way. The competition inspires students to learn the basic tenets of Ireland's foreign policy, and to consider how they can contribute to shaping it. Based on the competition students from schools across the island of Ireland are selected to participate in a week-long interactive programme held in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Iveagh House on St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.

The programme is based in Dublin and competition winners are responsible for their own accommodation and travel needs. In certain cases, a financial contribution towards travel and accommodation costs may be available to competition winners. This is on a case by case basis. Successful candidates receive details of how to apply for this.

Foreign Conflicts

594. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps Ireland is taking to encourage Ethiopia to lift the state of emergency and to encourage the Ethiopian Government to address the grievances of protesters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13446/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): We have been following the situation in Ethiopia closely, and with concern, since the declaration of a state of emergency in October last. Ireland and Ethiopia have developed a strong bilateral relationship since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1994. Ethiopia is one of Ireland's key partner countries for development cooperation, and we have developed strong political and economic relations. We provided over €29 million through our bilateral development programme to Ethiopia in 2016. Ireland's humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia amounted to a further €6.65 million in 2016.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa has been monitoring the situation closely since public demonstrations and protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions took place in late 2015. The protests grew in scope and scale throughout 2016 and culminated in violent clashes between protestors and security forces. Following an incident resulting in the deaths of at least 52 protesters, the Ethiopian Government declared a state of emergency on 9 October 2016. While it appears to have restored calm to the regions where protests took place, this has been accompanied by worrying reports regarding the high levels of detention and a tense human rights environment.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa engages regularly with the Ethiopian Government to express our concern at these political developments, and to encourage the Government to address the underlying causes of discontent. Ireland, with our EU partners, will continue this active dialogue with the Ethiopian Government and will continue to encourage the Government to engage with civil society and other political actors in Ethiopia.

Ireland has also raised concerns relating to the state of emergency at the Human Rights

Council on 15 March 2017, expressing concern at the large number of arrests and detention of protestors. This followed our statement at the Human Rights Council in September 2016, supporting the call by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for an independent, impartial and international human rights assessment of the Government's response to the protests which led to the introduction of the state of emergency. The EU has also engaged with the Ethiopian Government and raised concerns. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, spoke with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister in October 2016 and expressed her concern about the possible effect on democratic principles and civil rights of Ethiopian citizens.

On the 15 March, the Government of Ethiopia announced that there would be a partial lifting of the state of emergency, stating that arrests without court orders and searches without court papers will stop. The Government also announced that restrictions imposed on radio, television and theatre and dawn-to dusk prohibitions on unauthorised movements around infrastructure facilities and factories have been repealed.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa will continue to monitor the situation closely, and engage regularly with the Ethiopian Government.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

595. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action he is taking to ensure that development assistance is reaching the most vulnerable Ethiopians, regardless of their political affiliation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13447/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ethiopia has been a key partner country for Ireland's development assistance since 1994. Our assistance has at all times been focused on the most vulnerable people and communities in the country, regardless of their political views or affiliation. Last year, we provided some €29 million in long term development assistance in Ethiopia and a further €6.65 million in humanitarian assistance.

In designing and implementing Ireland's development assistance, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Addis Ababa work in close consultation with Government and local authorities in Ethiopia and with local communities and civil society.

A central element of Ireland's assistance is the Productive Safety Net Programme, which provides food and cash transfers to vulnerable people, on the basis of objective criteria, developed to ensure that those suffering from chronic hunger are reached. It is closely monitored to ensure that it reaches those most in need and is not subject to political interference.

Our programme aims to build the resilience of Ethiopia's poorest households, including through access to drought-tolerant, high-yielding seeds for small holder farmers and working to ensure that women and children have improved nutrition. We work closely with civil society organisations to promote education for minority groups, tackle violence against women and girls. As part of its work with civil society, Ireland is encouraging organisations and support vulnerable citizens, including people with disabilities to argue for and access quality services.

Ethiopia suffers from cyclical droughts and chronic food insecurity. The Government of Ethiopia has developed an impressive capacity to respond to climatic events, but still, last year, some 10.2 million people required and received emergency food assistance. In addition to these challenges, Ethiopia is hosting one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, with almost 800,000 refugees in need of annual humanitarian assistance.

In addition to our financial assistance, since the onset of the El Nino climate effect, in 2015, six members of the Irish Aid Rapid Response Corps have been deployed to Ethiopia to work with UN response operations. Three of these responders were deployed in recent weeks. We have also airlifted 30 tonnes of emergency relief supplies for distribution to those most in need. We are keeping the situation under close review and I expect that it will be necessary to provide further humanitarian support to Ethiopia in the coming period.

Passport Applications

596. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the average waiting time for Passport Express applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13507/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There is currently a very high volume of Passport applications in the system (over 60,000) and applications for the month of February ran at over 20% higher than the same month last year. Up to 16 March a total of 191,428 applications were received compared to a total of 155,163 for the same period in 2016. The turnaround times for the each category of applicant are updated weekly on the Passport Service website. The average processing time for renewal applications submitted through Passport Express is currently 16 working days (our aim is a 15 working day turnaround). First time applicants or those with lost/stolen passports take longer because of additional anti-fraud measures and these applications are being processed in an average of 23 working days (our aim is a 20 working day turnaround).

We are working extremely hard to manage the ongoing surge in passport applications. A total of 230 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) have been assigned to the Passport Service to assist with the processing of passport applications and respond to customer queries. The majority of the TCOs are now in place. I am continuing to closely monitor the situation.

As a matter of best practice, the Passport Service advises customers to apply at least six weeks prior to travelling and to submit their application through Passport Express if they have no immediate travel plans. There are a limited number of appointments available at the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork for those travelling in three weeks or less. These appointments can be made online.

The Passport Office offers a free email reminder service to Passport holders whose passports are due for renewal and I would urge the Deputy to promote use of this facility where possible. See: https://www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/top-passport-questions/when-should-i-apply-for-a-new-passport/

We are also engaged in a major programme of passport service reform which will result in greater efficiencies for applicants. I expect to make further announcements on this matter in the near future.

Human Rights Cases

597. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Bahraini Government revoked the nationality of a person (details supplied) on 20 June 2016; and if he will raise the case with his Bahraini counterpart. [13516/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the decision by the Bahraini authorities to revoke the citizenship of this person last June. In addition to revoking his citizenship, this person was tried on a number of grounds. Judgment was due to be handed down on 14 March, but latest reports are that a verdict will now be delivered in May.

Officials from my Department met this month with an official from the Bahraini Embassy in London to discuss human rights in Bahrain, including the issue of revocation of citizenship.

The right to a nationality is a fundamental human right. I am aware that, since 2014, Bahrain has revoked the citizenship of over 250 people. This is a worrying development, in particular in light of other recent moves in Bahrain to restrict freedom of expression, such as the dissolution of Al Wefaq, the largest opposition political grouping. I call on Bahrain to fully respect its international human rights obligations.

Actions like these increase sectarian divides, and only serve to stall Bahrain's path towards national reconciliation. The decision to revoke the citizenship of this person, and to put him on trial, has already triggered protests and demonstrations. Preventing people from expressing their views does not quash people's grievances; it only reinforces them. I call on the protesters and the Bahraini authorities alike to exercise restraint, for the protesters to express their views peacefully and for the authorities to permit them to do this.

The decision to revoke this person's citizenship also risks increasing regional tensions. I call on all leaders in the region, political and religious, to avoid actions and statements that would further increase these tensions. I urge Bahrain to recommit to an inclusive, peaceful and open dialogue for national reconciliation that will serve the interests of all Bahrainis, regardless of religious beliefs or political preferences.

I stand with our EU partners in continuing to support Bahrain, in promoting further reforms aimed at strengthening human rights and the rule of law in a context free of violence and where freedom of expression is respected.

Diaspora Issues

598. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which a submission to the inter-departmental committee on the Irish abroad can be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13734/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad oversees the implementation of "Global Irish – Ireland's Diaspora Policy." Chaired by the Minister for Diaspora Affairs, the Committee works to ensure that Government works in a joined-up way to realise the objectives of the diaspora strategy, including addressing issues affecting the Irish abroad and those seeking to return. The Department of the Taoiseach provides the Secretariat for the Committee. Submissions in respect of the Interdepartmental Committee can be made directly to the Department of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, Merrion Street Upper, Dublin 2.

Passport Applications

599. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 2 March 2017 and in view of the fact it is claimed that these

birth certificates were not returned from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, the avenue open to these persons in view of the fact the original birth certificates were issued in South Africa and it can take up to two years to obtain a replacement original. [13794/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As stated in my response of 2 March, under the Passports Act, 2008, my Department must be satisfied as to the identity of an individual before a passport can issue. The provision of an original birth certificate is a key requirement for the purposes of identity verification before the issuance of a passport.

All citizens are required to submit full, civil birth certificates in order for their application to be considered. The onus is on the applicant to provide my Department with documentary evidence of their identity. In this case, the applicant should pursue this matter with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service in order to retrieve the birth certificates before submitting a passport application.

Passport Applications Data

600. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish passports issued outside the State in each of the years 1997 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13903/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The numbers of passports issued by the Passport Service issued between 2006 and 2016 inclusively to citizens living outside the State are as follows:

Year	Passports issued
2006	92,243
2007	88,603
2008	85,961
2009	86,494
2010	84,762
2011	82,300
2012	86,115
2013	83,150
2014	85,738
2015	94,634
2016	114,455

The Passport Service does not have detailed statistics for the number of passports issued to persons outside the State prior to 2006. However, the following table provides the total number of passports issued between 1997 and 2005. Passports issued via our Embassies and Consulates overseas typically account for approximately 15% of all passports issued annually.

Year	Total
1997	327,862
1998	374,351
1999	430,662
2000	463,055
2001	468,625

Year	Total
2002	536,823
2003	552,047
2004	607,000
2005	672,000

There has been a steady increase in the number of passports issued to citizens living outside the State over the past three years. The most significant increase (at 21%) in the number of passports issued to citizens outside the state has been between 2015 and 2016. While the Passport Service does not compile information on why citizens apply for passports, it is reasonable to conclude that the outcome of the UK referendum on EU membership has led to an increase in demand. Other factors include the growth in outbound travel from Ireland and demographic changes.

Passport Applications

601. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when passports for the children of a person (details supplied) will issue; if any outstanding documentation is remaining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13964/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): All applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008 (the Act), which provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this legal requirement, each person must, therefore, demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship in his/her application.

The applicants referred to were born in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Their entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the terms of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 as amended (the 1956 Act). Section 6A provides that a person born in the State on or after 1 January 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside in the State or Northern Ireland without restriction at the time of that person's birth may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for an Irish passport) only where a parent has been lawfully resident in the State for three years of the four preceding his/her birth. Proofs of the lawful residence in the State are required to determine if a parent has the required three year residence. For non-EU parents, permissions to remain in the State on passports, and/or registration cards, as issued by the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), are acceptable proofs of a parent's lawful residence in the context of a passport application.

In this case, the applicants' non-EU father submitted his passport and GNIB registration card with his children's passport applications. These proofs show that his lawful residence dates from November 2013 to November 2018.

Given that this period postdates his children's dates of birth, none of this residence can be reckoned for the purposes of Section 6A of the 1956 Act.

The Department is aware that applicant's father had earlier residence in the State. However, this was authorised under permissions to remain in the State to study. It should be noted that the 2004 amendment of the 1956 Act, excludes such periods of residence for the purposes of Section 6A.

On the basis of the above, the children's entitlement to Irish citizenship has not been demonstrated under Section 6A of the 1956 Act.

It would remain open to the father of the applicants to pursue his children's entitlement to Irish citizenship by way of naturalization. To do this, he should contact the Department of Justice and Equality, who have responsibility for processing naturalization applications. In the event that their applications are successful, the children would be issued with certificates of naturalization, which can serve as evidence of their Irish citizenship in any future passport application.

In the meantime a formal decision on these applications will be taken on the basis of the documentation submitted and the Passport Service will be in touch with the applicants shortly.

Human Rights

602. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the referendum taking place in Turkey in April 2017, which could give President Erdoğan more powers; his further views on the future relationship with Turkey if the referendum passes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13973/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have repeatedly raised my ongoing concerns about human rights, democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression in Turkey. I am monitoring closely the Constitutional amendment package which was approved by the Turkish Grand Assembly on 21 January and which is now to be put to the people in a referendum scheduled to take place on 16 April. If passed, the amendments will invest considerably more power in the office of President, and reduce the role of Parliament. While the Head of State in many democracies has a strong executive function, the ongoing concerns at EU level and internationally about democracy and the rule of law in Turkey mean that there are serious considerations about the substance, timing and context of the constitutional proposals. The assessment of the Venice Commission emphasises those concerns very directly in its assessment of the proposed amendments, and also expresses concerns that the referendum is not being conducted in line with democratic standards due to the restrictions in place as part of the on-going State of Emergency imposed on 20 July after the attempted coup.

I would stress the EU statement of 13 March on the issue, which highlights concerns at the excessive concentration of powers in one office, with consequent effect on the necessary checks and balances in a democracy and on the independence of the judiciary. The EU encourages Turkey to deepen its cooperation with the Council of Europe and its bodies, and to address the concerns they have raised.

We also agree with the EU in acknowledging that Turkey is facing many challenges and reiterate that we stand by Turkey in the fight against terrorism.

Ireland believes that constructive engagement at all levels within the established political framework is the best way to encourage Turkey to renew a commitment to human rights, democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, and that matters of concern can only be resolved through open and direct communication channels.

That said, I must also express my strong regret that in the course of the referendum campaign, President Erdogan has made totally unacceptable claims about two fellow EU Member States. Such claims have no place in the dialogue between friendly countries.

Departmental Staff Data

603. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 268 of 23 February 2017, if he can provide details with regard to the one member of staff currently suspended in his Department, in tabular form (details supplied). [14058/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Further to parliamentary question 268 of 23 February 2017, I confirm that there is one such case in my Department. It would not be appropriate for my Department to provide the additional details requested as so doing could potentially identify the individual in question. My Department applies the provisions of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform circulars in relation to investigations, including that all civil servants must be treated in a fair and equitable manner in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

Questions Nos. 604 to 606, inclusive, taken with Question No. 586.

Food Imports

607. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if consideration will be given to banning goods produced in Israeli settlements in Palestine, in view of the fact these settlements are illegal under international law and the continued human rights violations that these illegal settlements create. [14115/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland has consistently highlighted the issue of settlements in EU and other international discussions. This includes the illegality of the settlement project as a whole, its destructive effect on the chances of reaching a peace agreement, and the multiple injustices and human rights concerns to which it gives rise. These issues have been at the centre of my interventions at the Foreign Affairs Council when the Middle East Peace process is discussed.

I was therefore also supportive of the UN Security Council's recent call on States, in Resolution 2334, to distinguish in their dealings between the territory of Israel and of the occupied territory. This differentiation is something which I have argued for at EU level and, as reported here to the House on many occasions, there have been a number of important steps taken in that regard in recent years, including in relation to product labelling and EU research funding.

I would be open to considering in principle a proposal that the EU should exclude products from illegal settlements from entering the EU market. However, the inescapable fact is that there is no prospect of such a proposal gaining wider support at present.

Departmental Legal Costs

608. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14133/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department generally seeks advice on legal matters from the Office of the Attorney General, the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the Department's own Legal Division. In particular, the Chief State Solicitor's Office provides legal advice in relation to commercial contracts and public procure-

ment matters. The Department has not engaged external private sector legal advice on these matters for 2016 and to date in 2017.

Depending on the subject-matter, litigation, including before the Court of Justice of the European Union, is dealt with on my Department's behalf by the Attorney General's Office, the Chief State Solicitor's Office or the State Claims Agency which engage external lawyers to act for the Department where necessary, including for personal injuries claims and other matters. At the international level, my Department, working closely with the Office of the Attorney General, acts as agent for the Government in relation to legal proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights and other international legal courts and bodies. The costs of any external lawyers engaged for litigation are not charged to my Department's Votes.

The Department's Missions abroad engage local legal advisers from time to time to deal with a range of miscellaneous matters.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

609. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW is providing funding to Dublin City Council for the flood defence project as part of the S2S footway and cycleway interim works scheme in Clontarf, Dublin 3; the amount of funding to be provided; if difficulties have been notified to his Department regarding these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12889/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney) : My officials advise that the Office of Public Works is not providing any funding for the works at Clontarf to which you refer. These works are being funded entirely by Dublin City Council (DCC) under the S2S project and the Council is best placed to provide the most up to date information and details on progress with those works.

Sale of State Assets

610. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total number of State assets sold since 2011; the use of the proceeds of these sales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13160/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): To date, the Exchequer has received nearly €1.5 billion in cash arising from the State Assets Disposal Programme and the sale of the National Lottery licence, comprising:

- €400m from ESB, generated from the sale of its 50% shareholdings in two overseas assets in the UK and Spain and from a realisation for the Government of the value of ESB's two midlands peat plants;

- €335m in respect of Aer Lingus, arising from its acquisition by IAG;

- €350m from Ervia, in respect of the sale of Bord Gais Energy; and

- €400m from sale of the National Lottery Licence.

When all of the remaining proceeds from the sale of Bord Gais Energy have been received, the final total from all of these State asset disposals is expected to be about €2.1 billion.

Since the State Asset Disposal Programme was agreed by Government, a number of significant announcements have been made of allocations of additional funding for capital investment to be funded from proceeds of the asset disposals. Details of these investment programmes are on my Department's website, and further detail about individual projects and programmes is available from the relevant Ministers and their Departments. However, in summary:

- In July 2012, in its first infrastructure stimulus plan involving a total investment of €2¼ billion, the Government announced that on foot of the State Assets Disposal Programme, it would undertake further Exchequer investment including enabling works to support the PPP projects. Almost €100m was made available for enabling works on the roads and education PPPs.

- In June 2013, the Government allocated €150m additional Exchequer investment to schools, energy efficiency and roads projects;

- At Budget 2014, the Government announced that along with the €200m already committed to the National Children's Hospital, some €200m would be invested from the proceeds of the Lottery Licence transaction and used for a range of projects and programmes;

- In May 2014, the Government allocated a further €200m of investment for a range of capital projects in a number of different sectors and regions across the country.

- At Budget 2015, the Government announced that €400m of the proceeds to be received from the sale of Bord Gais Energy would be made available to support the Government's Social Housing Strategy. The Department of Housing has been working on proposals to utilise this funding.

- In 2015, the Government allocated the €335m proceeds from the sale of its shareholding in Aer Lingus to establish a Connectivity Fund, to support commercial projects that enhance connectivity both within and for the State. The Connectivity Fund was established as a sub-Fund of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund and is being managed by that Fund.

In total, the Government has, to date, allocated over €1.5 billion from the proceeds of the State Assets Disposal Programme and the sale of the National Lottery licence to support jobs and economic development across the country. On this basis, it is clear that very substantial benefits for the public have been realised from this initiative.

Public Sector Pensions Data

611. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of pension restoration for retired public servants; if retired public servants in receipt of a public service pension will be engaged as part of the Public Service Pay Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12787/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 8203/17 on 21 February 2017.

Departmental Funding

612. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has been consulted by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment regarding potential proposals to provide financial assistance to An Post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12789/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has not raised with me any proposals to provide financial assistance to An Post.

Departmental Funding

613. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has been consulted by the Minister for Health or the HSE on the cost of the deal made between the HSE and the IMO for the restoration of the living out allowance for non-consultant doctors and on proposals to fund the deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12791/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised by the Deputy was the subject of deliberations between my Department and the Department of Health. Arising from this the Department of Health was informed that my Department was not in a position to provide extra monies in 2017 to fund the expenditure involved in the restoration of the living out allowance. Accordingly, the Department of Health will be required to provide the funding in respect of this cost from its current year financial allocation.

Capital Expenditure Programme

614. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount already allocated and the initiatives and programmes implemented with regard to the €5 billion extra funding allocated for capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12792/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A commitment was made in the Capital Plan to conduct a review in 2017 in order to take stock of progress and provide the Government with an opportunity to reaffirm priorities. Since the Capital Plan's publication, the Programme for a Partnership Government (PfPG) committed to seeking Oireachtas approval for additional capital investment of €4 billion over the period of the Capital Plan. This was further increased to €5.14 billion in the 2016 Summer Economic Statement.

Some of this additional €5.14 billion has already been allocated as follows:

- €750m was allocated in the 2017 Estimates - €250m in each of the 3 years 2017-2019. €450m of this was allocated to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, in support of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, with the remaining €300m allocated across a number of other Departments to supplement existing capital plans of those Departments, including: Transport, Tourism and Sport; Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources; Education and Skills; Jobs Enterprise and Innovation; and Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

- A further €1.75b was also pre-committed to supporting the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, bringing the overall additional commitment in this area to €2.2b.

The effect of the above is that there is approximately €2.64 billion additional uncommitted capital remaining to be allocated, on the basis of the findings of the review.

Capital Expenditure Programme

615. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the mid-term capital review will be open to public submissions; if so, the date of the deadline for submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12793/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, I recently announced the commencement of the review of the capital plan. As part of that review Departments have been asked to make submissions to my Department outlining their investment plans and priorities. Once these have been received from all Departments and in keeping with the transparency objective of the capital review process it is planned to publish the submissions on the Department's website.

Once this has taken place, my Department will commence a public consultation to ascertain the views of the public and key stakeholders on what our national infrastructure priorities should be in light of the Departmental submissions. This process will be open to all, consistent with my Department's November 2016 Consultation Principles & Guidance developed under Ireland's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan.

Office of Public Works Properties

616. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the ownership of a golf club (details supplied); and his plans for same. [12809/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney) : The property referred to by the Deputy is in the ownership of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland.

Officials in my office are currently in discussions with An Garda Síochána regarding this property and once these discussion conclude plans will then be formulated for the property.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

617. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason community employment supervisors were treated differently from CDP workers who were employed by community projects in relation to their pension entitlements. [12939/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information sought by the Deputy is not held by my Department and may be more appropriate for reply by my colleagues the Minister for Social Protection in respect of Community Employment Supervisors and the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government in respect of Community Development Programme (CDP) workers.

Capital Expenditure Programme

618. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether it is required in the public spending code that projects included in the capital investment plan should have undergone at least a preliminary business case analysis. [12960/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As specified in the Capital Plan itself each Government Department must ensure that individual projects and investment proposals are subject to all of the relevant appraisal processes and value for money

tests in accordance with the Public Spending Code (PSC) before Exchequer resources are committed under the Capital Plan.

The Capital Plan itself sets out the framework and broad direction for investment priorities and provides Exchequer allocations to Departments.

The Public Spending Code includes a comprehensive set of expenditure appraisal and Value for Money requirements, together with related guidance, covering all public expenditure at all stages in the spending lifecycle before, during and after spending. The complexity of the appraisal or evaluation of a project or programme, and the methods used, will depend on the size and nature of the project or programme and should be proportionate to its scale.

The Capital Plan also specifies that Departments are also responsible for ensuring that projects meet with appropriate regulatory requirements including those related to planning law and environmental impact assessments. In addition, it also points out that all capital investment projects and programmes costing more than €100 million will be subject to a further level of scrutiny, requiring specific Government approval before final contracts are agreed.

Finally, the PSC clearly acknowledges that the economic costs and benefits are not always the only factors influencing policy decisions regarding public expenditure. There may also be social or other public policy considerations which inform the decision making process. It observes that a fundamental principle is that nothing in the PSC should be taken as precluding Government or Ministers from deciding to approve projects independent of the evidence arising from detailed application of the Public Spending Code appraisal requirements. Any such decisions still require Departments to ensure that best practice is adhered to as regards public financial procedures generally, in terms of ensuring that the necessary terms and conditions are applied to secure full accountability and transparency for the funds including the rules regarding sanction of the Minister for Public Expenditure.

Roads Maintenance

619. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Rosscullane Road, Castlemaine, County Kerry (details supplied) will be refurbished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13009/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney) : I am advised by Office of Public Works (OPW) engineering staff that any damage to the Rosscullane Road in Castlemaine was not caused by OPW works. While this Office did undertake works in the Roscullen Island area in 2014, following the extensive floods of January and February of that year, the rock armour and boulders used to strengthen the riverbank were already in situ since previous years.

Accordingly, any remediation works to this road, if it a public road, would in the first instance be a matter for the Local Authority to consider.

Pension Levy

620. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to discontinue the public service pension reduction; and if so, when will it be discontinued. [13011/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public

Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), which was introduced on 1 January 2011, is a progressively structured imposition on public service pensions under terms set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2010, as amended.

The PSPR burden on pensioners, which was increased for higher income pensioners from July 2013 under FEMPI 2013, is now being significantly alleviated under FEMPI 2015. This substantial part-reversal of PSPR is proceeding in three stages over the period 2016 to 2018; when complete on 1 January 2018 it will mean that most public service pensioners are not affected by PSPR. All public service pensions with pre-PSPR values of up to €34,132 will be fully exempt from PSPR from then on, while those pensioners not fully removed from the reach of PSPR will, in the majority of cases, benefit by €1,680 per year.

That FEMPI 2015-driven amelioration of PSPR for pensioners is proportionately more substantial than the FEMPI 2015 income gains for serving public servants. In addition, the PSPR measure itself, both at launch time in 2011 and following rate increases in 2013 (under FEMPI 2013), has impacted less severely on pensioners than have the comparable FEMPI measures (pay cuts and PRD) on serving staff.

Any additional changes in the PSPR will be considered in the context of any further considerations in relation to the amendment of the FEMPI Acts.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

621. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Public Service Pay Commission report will be published; and when a decision will be made to reverse the cuts in pay and allowances to PDFORRA members of the Defence Forces. [13049/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay Commission has been tasked with providing an initial report to Government on public service remuneration in the context of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009 2015. The findings of the Commission will contribute to and inform Government's considerations in relation to Public Service remuneration and will inform Public Service employers in negotiations with staff interests on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Commission will report early in Quarter 2,2017.

Once this report is available, the Government intends to initiate negotiations on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. These negotiations will be between the Government as employer and the public service trade unions and representative associations on behalf of public service workers and will include public service remuneration issues pertaining to PDFORRA.

Public Sector Pay

622. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full year cost of unwinding FEMPI cuts for all public sector workers currently earning less than €65,000 gross per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13052/17]

623. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full year cost of unwinding FEMPI cuts for all public sector workers currently earning more than €65,000 gross per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13053/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 622 and 623 together.

After full implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the full year cost of unwinding the remaining FEMPI measures for public servants earning less than €65,000 gross per year is approximately €780m plus PRSI. The full year cost of unwinding the remaining FEMPI measures for public servants earning greater than €65,000 gross per year is approximately €632m plus PRSI.

Public Sector Pay

624. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full year cost of pay equalisation for post 2011 entrants into the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13054/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my answer to PQ Ref: 10498/17 on the 28th of February 2017.

Public Sector Pay

625. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full year cost of making the public sector a living wage employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13055/17]

626. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full year cost of making the Civil Service a living wage employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13056/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 625 and 626 together.

The most recent aggregate data (based on pay bands) available to the Department indicates that some 93% of all public service staff are on salary points in excess of €25,000 per annum. The commonly referenced living wage rate of €11.50 per hour, based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week, equates to an annual salary of €22,203.

Data on Civil Service staff indicates that only approx 4% of staff (FTE) in the Civil Service are on salary points less than €22,203, with the majority of those on points in the range €20,000 to €22,000. The estimated cost within the civil service, which is some 12% of the overall public service, would be €1.6m. Detailed costings in other sectors of the public service would require collation and estimation on an individual sector level, based on detailed data on the position of staff on each salary scale across the public service and details of the standard working hours per week for each individual grade. This detailed data is only available to individual public service employers.

Any of those currently on an annual salary of less than €22,203 in the public service may be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or may benefit from salary scales that progress to the referenced living wage through incremental progression.

From April 1st, the €1,000 increase in annualised salaries for public servants earning under €65,000 will further increase the numbers of public servants earning in excess of €11.50 per hour and reduce the potential additional cost accruing to the Exchequer from the introduction

of a Living Wage.

Departmental Expenditure

627. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated full year saving as a result of reducing all TD salaries to €75,000 and all Senators' salaries to €60,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13057/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I advised the Deputy in my reply to Question No. 368 on 18 October 2016 (ref. 30893/16), following the application of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, underpinned by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015, the following salary rates will apply to Members of the Oireachtas:

-	1 April 2017	1 January 2018
TD	€89,965	€92,672
Senator	€65,311	€65,621

Reducing the annual salary rate of a TD to €75,000 and a Senator to €60,000 from 1 January 2018 would yield annual savings of €2,792,176 and €337,260 respectively.

Public Sector Pay

628. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full-year costs of increasing gross pay of all public sector workers under €30,000 by 1%, 2%, 3% and 5%, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13058/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Based on the latest data available to the Department the costs are estimated as follows:

Number of Public Servants (FTE) earning under €30,000	Cost of 1% increase	Cost of 2% increase	Cost of 3% Increase	Cost of 5% Increase
39,483	€11m	€22m	€33m	€55m

Flood Relief Schemes Status

629. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason for the delay in the OPW formally approving the lower Morell River flood relief scheme and the funding of same in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13116/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Kildare County Council (KCC) is the Contracting Authority for the Lower Morell River Flood Relief Scheme and the Council is managing and overseeing the necessary work to progress the scheme.

Formal approval of the scheme and its funding by the Office of Public Works (OPW) will happen when KCC and its consultants complete the detailed design and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and are ready to submit the scheme for planning approval. This should happen over the next few weeks. KCC is working on finalising the detailed design and the EIS

which includes liaising with the various landowners / stakeholders who will be impacted by the proposed works.

It is hoped that the proposed scheme will receive planning approval in time to allow work to commence before end 2017.

I can confirm that the Lower Morell Scheme remains a priority and the OPW has included provision for the cost of the proposed works in its financial profiles in the period up to 2020.

Ministerial Allowances

630. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Questions Nos. 479 and 480, if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [13167/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have reviewed the records of overnight expenses paid to Minsters and Ministers of State who have served in this Department since 2011 and I can confirm that none have been paid expenses in respect of an overnight in Dublin.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

631. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will confirm that in line with the one-person, one-salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and that if any such remuneration is being paid, it will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13328/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the only State Board under the remit of my Department. I can confirm that no public servant on the PAS Board is given any payment for their services on that board.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

632. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects recruitment in specific vital areas of the public sector to become a policy initiative in the future, especially in areas such as counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13351/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching policy responsibility for workforce planning in the Civil Service, including recruitment.

The initiation of a recruitment campaign for any particular civil service grade is determined by such factors as identified workforce planning requirements and the need to establish priorities for targeted recruitment into the civil service to meet specific service and skill needs.

As the Deputy will recall in Budget 2015, it was announced that there would be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key

skills

A number of open graduate recruitment campaigns have been held in late 2015 and 2016.

I understand from the Public Appointments Service, who are the independent recruiter for the civil service, that the following appointments have been made to the Sligo, Leitrim and Longford areas since 2014:

Grade	Sligo/Leitrim/Longford
Executive Officer	10
Clerical Officer	76
Temporary Clerical Officer	627

Further consideration will be given throughout 2017 to resourcing and staffing needs for the Civil Service.

Recruitment plans for the public service more generally are a matter, in the first instance, for the Minister with responsibility for each of the relevant sectors of the public service.

Departmental Staff

633. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the outcome of the arbitration between his Department and the CPSU in relation to the integration of the staff officer and executive officer roles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13459/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Civil Service Arbitration Board has made its report on this matter which I have accepted. This report was laid before the House on 10 March 2017 and is available on the Oireachtas website at http://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/PERdoclaid100317_102543.pdf.

State Properties

634. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a list of all State properties sold in County Kerry between 2011 and February 2017; and the valuation of each at the time of sale. [13642/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The following properties owned by the Commissioners of Public Works were sold in County Kerry from 2011 to date.

- The former Garda station in Lauragh, County Kerry was valued and sold for €115,000 during 2016.

- The former Garda Station in Fenit, County Kerry was valued and sold for €110,000 during 2017.

There were no properties owned by the Commissioners of Public Works sold in County Kerry from the years 2011 to 2015.

Other public sector bodies may have sold properties, however the Commissioners would not have been involved in these disposals and therefore would not have details of same.

State Properties

635. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of properties currently owned by the State in County Kildare or under long-term lease to the State that are currently vacant; the attempts that are being made to fill them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13716/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland currently own one vacant property in County Kildare. This property is the former Garda Station in Rathangan and is currently being prepared for disposal. There are no vacant properties in County Kildare on long term lease.

Garda Station Refurbishment

636. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the OPW's discussions on the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13744/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Garda Station in question is located in a leased premises. The Office of Public Works continues to engage in discussions with the Landlord regarding the extent of necessary works to be carried out on the property. This process is ongoing and agreement has yet to be reached.

Inland Fisheries

637. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a fish counter will be provided as promised by IFI and the OPW on the River Nore, Kilkenny city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13828/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The provision of a fish counter would fall within the remit of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). Should the IFI propose to provide a fish counter in the River Nore at this location and request the assistance of the OPW, this Office shall endeavour to assist in so far as is possible.

Departmental Staff

638. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Question No. 270 of 23 February 2017, if he will provide details with regard to the one member of staff currently suspended in his Department, in tabular form (details supplied). [14059/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the process is ongoing and we are not in a position to release further information at this point in time.

Departmental Staff Data

639. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Re-

form further to Question No. 270 of 23 February 2017, the reason he requested answers to the question from each Department except the Departments of Health and Education and Skills. [14062/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the subject matter of Parliamentary Question Number 270 of 23 February, 2017 did not relate to public affairs connected with my Department or to matters of administration for which I am officially responsible (including bodies under the aegis of my Department in respect of Government policy).

The question fell within the responsibilities of other Ministers, so my Department transferred the question to all Departments for their direct reply as is common practice with such questions.

I understand that on this occasion all Departments with the exception of the Departments of Health and Education and Skills accepted the transfer and replied to the Deputy. In this context, the Deputy may wish to submit a similar question directly to those Departments.

Departmental Schemes

640. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Civil Service spouses and children's superannuation scheme was introduced by way of circular letter P18/12/67, dated 18 May 1984; if the Minister had the authority to issue such a circular; the reason membership of the scheme is obligatory on all civil servants, regardless of their health, family circumstances or other circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14083/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Revised Civil Service Spouses and Children's Pension Scheme (the "Revised Scheme") was introduced in 1984 as a result of an agreed recommendation made by General Council under the Scheme for Conciliation and Arbitration for the Civil Service. The recommendation was regarding the amendment of certain provisions of the Civil Service Spouses and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme (the "Old Scheme") - General Council Report 1018 refers.

The authority to issue a circular on this matter derives from Section 17 of the Civil Service Regulation Act, 1956 which states inter alia,

"The Minister shall be responsible for the following matters - ...

(c) the fixing of -

(i) the terms and conditions of service of civil servants".

Membership of the Spouses and Children's Scheme has been compulsory for all new entrants into the Civil Service since 1984. The Scheme is structured on a group insurance basis and the member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members.

Departmental Legal Costs

641. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the

solicitors' firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, who provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14137/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the table outlines the total amount spent on legal advice by my Department since 2015:

Year	Name	Amount
2015	Philip Lee Solicitors	€5,535
	ByrneWallace Solicitors	€123,221
	*Consultant R. Humphreys	€54,312
	*Consultant C. Kennedy	€57,530
		€240,598
2016	ByrneWallace Solicitors	€207,901
	Eversheds	€394,954
		€602,855
2017	Eversheds	€60,023
		€60,023

* R. Humphreys gave legal advice/support in drafting legislative proposals under the Government Reform Programme. C. Kennedy was a consultant who worked on the Statute Law Revision programme. Both were engaged in line with public procurement rules.

State Bodies

642. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it is standard practice for a private consultant to be used to recruit for non-commercial State employment vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14261/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The recruitment of staff in Non-Commercial State Bodies (NCSBs) is a matter for the management of the Bodies in consultation with their parent Department in the first instance. This Department does not have a role in determining the method through which staff are recruited. It is understood that NCSBs may, if they wish, use the Public Appointments Service (PAS) for recruitment purposes.

Leader Programmes Funding

643. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason not-for-profit community child care centres are not permitted to apply for Leader funding under the current rural development programme; her plans to include community child care centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13521/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Funding under the LEADER Programme is targeted at innovative approaches to addressing the needs of rural areas as identified in the Local Development Strategies prepared for each sub-regional area. The funding can be provided under a broad range of themes, including enterprise development and social inclusion. It is important, however, to ensure that the available funding is targeted at policy areas where it can provide the greatest added value and avoid duplication.

Provision for community childcare is currently available through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the local County Childcare Committees. It is not, therefore, proposed to extend the LEADER Programme to include the provision of childcare facilities at present.

Animal Welfare

644. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the report submitted by Dublin Zoo to the National Parks and Wildlife Service which detailed that the zoo had over 100 animal deaths in the space of two years between 2014 and 2016, including a number of animals on loan from other zoos; her views on whether this will damage the zoo's reputation; if international comparisons have been sought for best practice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14146/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is responsible for implementing the European Communities (Licensing and Inspection of Zoos) Regulations 2003, relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is responsible for the inspection and licensing of zoos and appoints suitable persons as inspectors for the purposes of these Regulations.

The most recent inspection of Dublin Zoo took place in July 2016 and the report provided by my Department's zoo inspectorate notes that Dublin Zoo is a leader of best practice in Ireland and Europe. As part of the zoo inspection process the animal inventory of each zoo is reviewed and any anomalies are highlighted by the zoo inspectors for clarification. If deemed necessary, individual post-mortem reports may also be reviewed. No issues around welfare, husbandry or diet were identified during recent inspections of Dublin Zoo.

Mortality rates are a product in part of species which naturally have short life cycles or with naturally high mortalities of newly born or hatched specimens. During inspection, any unusual instances of mortality are discussed with the zoo in question and reviewed, and where appropriate the post-mortems are also reviewed.

I understand that the deaths reported for 2014 and 2015 in Dublin Zoo are considered a normal part of the life cycle of the zoo's collection and that there are currently no concerns in relation to the mortality patterns noted at the zoo.

It is the experience of my Department's zoo inspectorate that Dublin Zoo provides very high quality care for the animals under their care.

As a fully licensed zoo, Dublin Zoo is due to be inspected next later in 2017. As with previous inspections, a report will be compiled on foot of this inspection and any discrepancies or contraventions of the zoo regulations that are identified will be noted in that report.

National Parks

645. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to increase the number of national parks here (details supplied); her views on whether more national parks would have a positive effect on the environment, wildlife and tourism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14182/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department

manages an extensive conservation and recreational property portfolio of some 79,000 hectares. Our 6 National Parks account for circa 60,000 hectares with another almost 20,000 hectares of nature reserves and other heritage sites.

While the existing National Parks are managed from a conservation perspective, it is also recognised that they are 'core assets' which play a very important role in Ireland's tourism industry. The National Parks and Wildlife Service manages and maintains more than 485km of trails between National Parks, Nature Reserves and other conservation/recreational properties. These are dispersed geographically across the country and attracted in excess of €4 million visitors annually. Within the National Parks alone, the NPWS is responsible for a trail network spanning some 220km, including both cycling and walking trails, which run over some of the most iconic and scenic landscapes in Ireland. In addition, long-distance trails such as the Wicklow and Kerry Way, 129km and 122km respectively, run through the National Parks and are also maintained by the NPWS.

Given the resources available for capital investment within our National Parks and Nature Reserves, I am ever mindful of the need to focus on the core responsibilities relating to the management of the existing Parks and Reserves lands and have no plans at present to increase the number of National Parks in the country. However, as part of my Department's continuing commitment and contribution to improving our tourism product, we have been exploring ways to optimise the sustainable tourism potential of heritage sites under our control in a way that is compatible with conservation objectives In this context, it should be noted that in late 2016 my Department negotiated the extension of Wicklow Mountains National Park by purchasing almost 4,900 acres of Dublin Uplands at Glenasmole in 2016 at a cost of €800,000. The purchase underpins the Government's on-going commitment to the preservation of our natural heritage for future generations of citizens and visitors alike to enjoy.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, launched a strategic partnership earlier this year with a view to growing tourism revenues in the rural areas where the parks are located and increasing Ireland's appeal as a holiday destination. Fáilte Ireland will be investing capital funding of €500,000 to kick-start the initiative. This initial funding will focus on the five National Parks and five Nature Reserves situated on the Wild Atlantic Way in addition to Wicklow Mountains National Park. The funding will facilitate the undertaking of feasibility, scoping and design of tourism projects, building on the strengths of each location, as well as further promoting our National Parks and Nature Reserves for visitors and tourists.

Architectural Heritage

646. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which the built environment continues to be protected for the benefit of present and future generations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14272/17]

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.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

647. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the NPWS will make available the conservation rangers' reports, vet reports and hare capture reports for the 2016-17 hare coursing season. [12877/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The current 2016/17 coursing season finished at the end of February. It is intended to publish the various reports for the 2016/17 season compiled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service staff of my Department and the Irish Coursing Club on the NPWS website. There will be some 200 separate reports - including NPWS ranger reports, ICC Reports, ICC Veterinary Reports - ranging over 70 coursing meetings – and arrangements are underway to publish them as soon as possible.

The various reports for the 2015/16 coursing season have been published on the NPWS website.

Waterways Ireland Remit

648. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has considered the implications of increasing powers to Waterways Ireland, as proposed in the Heritage Bill 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12878/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Heritage Bill 2016 includes provisions to amend the Canals Act 1986. The amendments to the Canals Act 1986 are primarily enabling provisions to allow for the making of bye-laws to regulate boating on the canals and to manage the use of the canals.

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 proposed changes will allow Waterways Ireland to make new bye-laws to proactively manage the Royal and Grand Canals, as well as the Barrow Navigation.

The proposed amendments provide for the regulation of the canals; the issue of permits or licences to regulate the use of boats on the canals and on canal property; the regulation of the type or class of boat which may be used on the canals; the regulation of berths and moorings and the placing of buoys on the canals or other canal property; the regulation and care of animals on the canals and other canal property; the appointment and powers of authorised officers and the service of directions.

Our waterways make a vital contribution to tourism, attracting visitors from around Ireland and from abroad. With approximately 500 boats on the three systems, Waterways Ireland is seeking to encourage more visiting boats onto the waterways.

However, the existing bye-law regime is not conducive to advancing this objective. The pro-

posed legislative changes are intended to encourage tourism and leisure craft users by supporting the investment already made by Waterways Ireland in new infrastructure and facilities along the canals and by enhancing Waterways Ireland's ability to manage, maintain and develop the canals as a vibrant recreational and tourist amenity for all waterway users.

National Museum

649. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the process by which an association (details supplied) can have the Ardagh Chalice put on display in the village of Ardagh as part of its itinerary of commemorative events being planned for 2018 to mark the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Ardagh Chalice in Ardagh, County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12968/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The matter to which the Deputy refers is a day-to-day matter for the National Museum.

I understand that the National Museum of Ireland is working on plans for the anniversary of the discovery of the Ardagh Chalice in September 2018. The Museum has indicated that it will not be possible to display the chalice elsewhere as a consequence.

However, I understand that the Museum has been in contact directly with the association to discuss how the Museum could work with them on this important anniversary.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

650. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason for the delay in providing already approved compensation to a person (details supplied) and others in similar situations that have given a commitment to cease cutting of turf on sensitive sites; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13022/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The individual referred to in the Deputy's Question applied to sell her interest in land in a raised bog natural heritage area under the voluntary bog purchase scheme, administered by my Department.

The 2014 Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network 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, 46 raised bog natural heritage areas (including parts of 7 sites) are scheduled for de-designation. The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 provides for the de-designation of these sites.

The raised bog natural heritage area referred to in the Deputy's Question is scheduled for de-designation. Domestic turf cutting may continue on this site, while large scale or commercial turf cutting will continue to be regulated through other consent systems.

The position of applications under the voluntary bog purchase scheme, with plots in the sites scheduled for de-designation, is being considered within my Department.

Rural Development Policy

651. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she has taken to identify and ameliorate the primary issues hindering rural development, especially in regard to counties Sligo and Leitrim, with particular reference to the need to maintain a viable rural population and the recently announced action plan for rural development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13096/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 23 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 across the whole country. 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, both of which will be open to applications from counties Sligo and Leitrim. 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 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.

Arts Promotion

652. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she continues to encourage the promotion and development of the arts, with particular reference to the maximisation of employment opportunities arising therein, especially in regard to counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13098/17]

655. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** 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 levels within counties Sligo and Leitrim, directly or indirectly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13101/17]

657. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** 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, especially in regard to counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13103/17]

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

Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 652, 655 and 657 together.

Funding for the arts at all levels is primarily a matter for the Arts Council. 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).

The Taoiseach and I launched the Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022 on the 8 December 2016. Funding of €5m for the implementation of the programme was provided in Budget 2017.

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 2nd 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.

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. Under the scheme the Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo was awarded funding of €550,000. The Dock, in partnership with Leitrim County Council, was awarded funding of over €178,000 and North Leitrim Glens were awarded €50,000.

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.

In addition to the increase in funding for the Arts Council, and for the Creative Ireland Programme, Budget 2017 also includes an additional €1 mill ion to the Heritage Council. I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget. 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.

These kinds of investment are at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland Programme and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

The Action Plan for Rural Development, which I launched with the Taoiseach in January, 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.

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 and to ensure that all areas of the country benefit from the increased investment.

National Heritage Plan

653. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which various at-risk heritage sites and buildings within counties Sligo and Leitrim continue to be protected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13099/17]

654. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she is engaged in the restoration of major historical or cultural sites in counties Sligo and Leitrim at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13100/17]

658. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will make an audit of all historical buildings, including those of architectural and cultural interest, especially in regard to counties Sligo and Leitrim; the degree to which alterations have been made in the past ten years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13104/17]

667. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she is taking to preserve, support, maintain and promote heritage sites throughout counties Sligo and Leitrim and the country as a whole, with particular reference to the importance of ensuring that nothing is lost with regard to preservation for future generations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13349/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 653, 654, 658 and 667 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.

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.

The NIAH published surveys in 2007 for Sligo and in 2004 for Leitrim and issued ministerial recommendations to both councils for additions to their Record of Protected Structures. My Department has also published an introductory book to the built heritage of both counties.

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 declara-

tion 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.

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. The scheme provided funding for 278 projects nationally in 2016, including three projects in Leitrim and eight projects in Sligo. 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, including one project in Leitrim and three projects in Sligo. 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 is now closed, however on-going queries can be addressed to all respective local authorities who are implementing both schemes throughout 2017.

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.

Question No. 655 answered with Question No. 652.

Arts Funding

656. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which local community-based festivals within counties Sligo and Leitrim have benefitted 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. [13102/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The LEADER Programme provides a wide range of supports to local community groups for a broad range of activities. Under the 2007 – 2013 LEADER Programme in excess of €150,000 was provided in LEADER grant aid for community based festivals in County Sligo while over €282,000 was provided in County Leitrim. 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.

While to date festivals based in Sligo or Leitrim have not been grant-aided under this Programme, there have been four Irish festivals involved as partners in projects with a total project grant allocation of just under €3 million. The Culture sub-programme also funds EU networks and platforms via operating grants for the lead organisations.

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.

Question No. 657 answered with Question No. 652.

Question No. 658 answered with Question No. 653.

Philanthropy Initiatives

659. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the arts sector continues to attract philanthropic support; the extent to which this support occurs; if she will provide a breakdown on the destination of philanthropic funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13105/17]

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. While my Department does not have a breakdown of the total flows of philanthropic funding to the sector, the Programme for a Partnership Government does contain 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 fundraising 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 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 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.

It is hoped that this initiative will further stimulate private support for the arts.

Departmental Schemes

660. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the 2017 town and village renewal scheme will be announced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13147/17]

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.

Further details 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.

Irish Language

661. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the action she is taking to support the Irish language; the initiatives she will enact

to make the use of the Irish language more commonplace; the action she will take to further promote the use of the Irish language in the EU as Brexit approaches; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13213/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): My Department is working in partnership with a broad range of organisations to support the Irish language and to support and encourage its use on a daily basis. This work incorporates a broad range of research, development and training in various sectors. Under my Department's Irish Language Support Schemes, funding continues to be provided for Irish language courses in third-level institutions in Ireland and overseas and for terminology initiatives which support the status of Irish as an official and working language of the European Union. Funding is also provided for various organisations which promote the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht.

As technology advances and its use becomes more commonplace within society generally, it is expected that the use of Irish language technology will become more prevalent. To this end, my Department is continuing to support the provision of Irish language resources online and via the development of apps. In addition, funding is allocated to assist youth organisations and schools through the TechSpace as Gaeilge initiative to purchase digital media equipment. This new project was launched in 2015 and is aimed at young Irish language speakers interested in developing their digital media skills. TechSpace is a national network which helps young people to create digital and technological material as they engage in activities such as digital film, web design, mobile app development and robotics, among others. Techspace as Gaeilge was piloted in Connacht and it is currently being rolled out in the Munster region. It is proposed to roll out TechSpace as Gaeilge nationally, on phased basis over the coming years.

Also funded by my Department is the development by Fiontar, Dublin City University, of a database of EU terminology in the Irish language, an online database of place names and a joint project between the Department, UCD and DCU to digitise the Schools' Collection of National Folklore Collection. Funding is also being provided to Trinity College Dublin for the development of the Irish language synthesiser project, abair.ie.

Funding in the region of €1m annually is provided through the Advanced Irish language Skills Initiative for a range of specialised third-level Irish language courses such as translation, interpretation, and law for the provision of suitably qualified persons to meet recruitment needs in the EU.

A total of €7.812m has been provided to my Department in 2017 for the promotion and maintenance of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht. This allocation consists of €1.422m in capital expenditure for the construction and refurbishment of language based facilities and the upgrade of summer colleges. The current funding allocation of €6.390m covers various language-centred programmes and schemes such as the Irish Language Summer Colleges, summer camps, language assistants in schools and other cultural activities directed primarily towards children and young people.

The work of Údarás na Gaeltachta is, of course, also vital in our efforts to maintain the Irish language as the community language of the Gaeltacht. An tÚdarás currently supports the creation of in the region of 500 Gaeltacht-based jobs annually and also funds community development structures, the Irish language arts and pre-school education in Gaeltacht areas.

Work is also ongoing in respect of the language planning process provided for in the Gaeltacht Act 2012. At present, 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas have been recognised for the purposes of the Act. Under the Act, Gaeltacht Service Towns are defined as those towns situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas and which have a significant role

in providing public services and recreational, social and commercial facilities for those areas. Late in 2016, notices were published under the Act in respect of Daingean Uí Chúis, Co. Kerry, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, and Galway City. This effectively starts the process to prepare and implement language plans for these Gaeltacht Service Towns. Foras na Gaeilge is responsible under the Act for supporting organisations with regard to the preparation and implementation of language plans in Irish Language Networks, those areas outside the Gaeltacht which have achieved a basic critical mass of community and State support for the Irish language. Foras na Gaeilge has selected Loughrea, Co. Galway, Ennis, Co. Clare, and Clondalkin, Dublin as Irish Language Networks and the process to prepare language plans in respect of these networks has now begun.

In addition, my Department provides co-funding, in co-operation with the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, to Foras na Gaeilge to carry out its legislative mandate to promote the Irish language on an all-island basis. In that context, Foras na Gaeilge supports a wide range of initiatives which promote the use of Irish in everyday life. Foras supports the work of six lead organisations which focus on key strategic areas such as education, raising language awareness and creating opportunities to use the language, in addition to community and economic development.

The Deputy will be interested to learn that my Department recently held a Brexit consultation event with its stakeholders, which included Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Conradh na Gaeilge, for the purpose of gaining an insight into the difficulties these organisations potentially face as a result of Brexit. This exercise proved particularly fruitful, given the high level of engagement by all parties, and the insights gained by my Department will assist it in minimising the impact of Brexit on its stakeholders.

Further information about the work of the Department and organisations under its remit is available on its website at: www.ahrrga.gov.ie.

Commemorative Events

662. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans to re-establish the all-party consultation group on the decade of commemorations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13268/17]

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.

Arts Funding

663. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the charge to the Exchequer of a 10% increase to the arts budget

of her Department. [13278/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 Revised Estimates for Public Services was published in December by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and are available on that Department's website at http://www.per.gov.ie/en/rev/.

As is shown in the published figures, the 2017 allocation to Arts, Culture and Film is €158.261m and most of this is allocated to the agencies under the aegis of the Department. Details of the expenditure outturns are published each year in the Appropriation Account and these are published by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General at www.audgen.gov.ie.

It should be noted that 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.*

Compensation Schemes

664. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to pay compensation to any farmer who has designated land which they cannot sell; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13279/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulation and the Wildlife Acts, compensation may be payable where a person has been refused consent by me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, for a prescribed activity within a designated site that he or she had been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal. However, compensation schemes have generally been put in place, where required, without the need to undergo a formal process under the relevant legislation. Such schemes include a comprehensive compensation scheme for those affected by the cessation of turf cutting on raised bog habitat.

National Museum

665. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the National Museum of Ireland's Museum of Country Life in Castlebar has the necessary funding and resources to remain open to the public and provide a high-quality of service for the next five years. [13322/17]

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

Humphreys): The National Museum of Ireland is currently engaged in a master planning process for all its sites including the Museum of Country Life. This process has included consultations in recent months with staff as well as with local stakeholders on the future direction of the Museum of Country Life and how best to enhance and expand the Museum's presence there.

I will continue to be supportive of the Chair and the new board in implementing change in the museum, as well as preparing new plans to improve the museum's services to the public over the coming years.

Since 2015, I have obtained significant additional resources for our national cultural institutions including the National Museum. In the last Budget, I obtained an extra €2 million across the Cultural Institutions of which €650,000 was allocated to the National Museum. This confirms my commitment towards progressively increasing funding for the arts and culture as the economy improves.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

666. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of her department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13329/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am informed that, in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the aegis of my Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Question No. 667 answered with Question No. 653.

Film Industry Promotion

668. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she encourages internationally the use of Ireland, particularly counties Sligo and Leitrim, as a film location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13350/17]

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 Funding

669. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide details on local authority contributions to the arts including their definition of arts funding and a breakdown of proportional expenditure; and the breakdown between capital and current expenditure by each local authority, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13400/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department does not collect statistics on local authority expenditure on the arts.

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 works in partnership with local authorities in developing the arts at local level. The Council also has a similar long-term partnership with Údarás na Gaeltachta under its Ealaín na Gaeltachta programme in Gaeltacht areas. Details of its funding to local authorities are routinely published on its website and in the Council's annual reports.

My Department provides capital funding for arts and cultural infrastructure. I 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.

Arts Funding

670. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and

Gaeltacht Affairs the details of each artist funded by Culture Ireland in 2014, 2015 and 2016 either via grant or sponsorship, in tabular form; the amounts received in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13445/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Culture Ireland, a division of my Department, was established in 2005 with a focussed remit to promote Irish arts worldwide. Culture Ireland operates a grant funding scheme designed to support the presentation and promotion of Irish arts internationally and raise the global awareness and appreciation of Irish arts, develop new audiences and generate career opportunities for Irish artists.

Details of the artists funded by Culture Ireland from 201 4 to 2016 and the amount they were awarded can be found on the Culture Ireland website using the following link: http://applications.cultureireland.ie/index.php?r=reports/outcomeGrant&year=2016&program_id=1.

Departmental Expenditure

671. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason that €3.8 million of the capital carryover from 2016 into 2017 arising from an underspend on the decade of centenaries 1912-1922 has been allocated to other purposes in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13647/17]

672. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason the €0.5 million of capital carryover from 2016 into 2017 arising from an underspend on the Gaeltacht support schemes has been allocated to other purposes in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13648/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 671 and 672 together.

Public Financial Procedures provide that a maximum of 10% of the capital envelope of a Vote may be carried over by way of deferred surrender to the following year for spending in that year on priority capital programmes subject to the approval of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Procedures do not require that the savings are carried over into the programme area in which they arose.

Having regard to known pressures across programme areas in my Department for 2017, and having regard to the totality of expenditure across my Department's Vote in 2016, including the redistribution of savings in 2016 by means of virement sanctioned by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I am satisfied that the distribution of the capital carryover for spending on priority capital programmes in 2017 is appropriate.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme

673. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the criteria under the built heritage investment scheme; if an historical site (details supplied) would qualify for this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13672/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Built Heritage Investment Scheme was developed to assist with the repair and conservation of structures that are protected under the *Planning and Development Act 2000*

(as amended). The scheme is expected to support over three hundred 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 categories of structures eligible for assistance under the Built Heritage Investment Scheme are as follows:

- Protected structures, i.e. those structures included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) of each planning authority.

- Proposed Protected Structures, i.e., those structures that are proposed for inclusion in the RPS of each planning authority but have not yet been formally approved for inclusion. All proposed protected structures awarded funding under this scheme must be added to the RPS by 31 December 2017, or

- Structures in Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), or within the amenity of a National Monument, where exceptional circumstances are deemed by the Department to apply.

I understand that the structure in question is not on the RPS of the local authority and is not a National Monument. The Circular setting out the terms and conditions for the Built Heritage Investment Scheme 2017 is available on all local authority websites, and on my Department's website. Any enquiries about the scheme should be directed to the relevant local authority.

Applications from members of the public for the Built Heritage Investment Scheme 2017 were accepted in local authorities throughout the month of February and have now closed. The applications will be assessed by each local authority and a final list of projects submitted to me for approval by the end of this month. Successful applicants will be notified by their local authority shortly thereafter.

Local Authority Funding

674. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when local authorities will receive funding under the structures at risk fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13673/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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. Structures must be on the local authority Record of Protected Structures. The 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.

Applications from members of the public for the 2017 Structures at Risk Fund were accepted in local authorities throughout the month of February and have now closed. Each local authority can select up to three applications and submit to my Department for assessment by an expert panel. It is expected that the panel will meet before the end of this month and successful applicants will be notified by their local authority shortly thereafter.

The Circular setting out the terms and conditions for the Structures at Risk Fund 2017 is available on all local authority websites, and on my Department's website. Any enquiries should be directed to the relevant local authority.

Departmental Staff Data

675. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide details of employment within her Department including the number of persons that are employed in each office or sector in tabular form. [13674/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, as of 16 March 2017, there were 620.54 staff (Whole Time Equivalent) employed in my Department. The staff numbers are broken down as follows:

Division	Whole Time Equivalent	Headcount
Secretary General	1	1
Corporate	94.02	98
Arts	87.60	90
Heritage	332.48	345
Regional & Rural	48.31	49
Gaeltacht	57.13	59
Total	620.54	642

Arts Council

676. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff employed by the Arts Council. [13675/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Arts Council has a current staff of 42.5 full-time equivalents. A list of contact details for Arts Council staff and advisers can be accessed on its website at the following link:

http://www.artscouncil.ie/Contact-us/Staff-and-adviser-lists/.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

677. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount her Department has spent on external consultant reports since 1 January 2011 in tabular form. [13676/17]

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

Year	Expenditure (€)
2011	34,678
2012	10,959

Year	Expenditure (€)
2013	28,782
2014	60,368
2015	24,747
2016	1,833
2017	0
Total	161,367

Heritage Council Funding

678. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the application to the Heritage Council by a person (details supplied) for part funding for the re-thatching of a listed thatched building at the same address; if there are other schemes managed by her Department from which funding could be sourced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13977/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While the Heritage Council is funded by my Department, it is a statutorily independent body and as such, I have no role in respect to the matter referred to. My Department has two schemes which are operated through the local authorities to assist in the conservation of our built heritage and which could include thatched structures. However, the final date for receipt of applications for both schemes by the local authorities has now closed for this year.

I launched a €2 million scheme - the Built Heritage Investment Scheme - for the repair and conservation of protected structures in October 2015. This scheme operated in 2016 and is being operated again in 2017, on the same model as the very successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, which ran in 2014.

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. 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.

My Department does not administer a funding scheme specifically for thatched structures. However, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government administers a grant scheme for the renewal or repair of thatched roofs of owner occupied houses. Full details are available from their website or by contacting the Thatching Grants Section of that Department.

Departmental Legal Costs

679. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the total amount spent externally by her Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, who provided services to her Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14126/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no expenditure was incurred from my Department's Admin-

istrative Budget in respect of external legal services since 2015. For completeness, I would bring to the Deputy's attention that, from time to time, my Department makes payments to the Chief State Solicitor's Office in respect of legal services provided to my Department by that Office.

Foreshore Licence Applications

680. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 1 March 2017, if her Department's observations dated 13 May 2016 requested by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on an application (details supplied) are based on a thorough examination and robust scientific assessment of the application and its supporting documentation as a whole; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14151/17]

681. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 1 March 2017, if she is satisfied that her Department has properly advised the public and the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on an application (details supplied) when officially consulted in March and April 2016 by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, in view of the concerns raised by 555 public submissions and an organisation's observations on the application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14152/17]

682. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 1 March 2017, if her views on whether her Department's observations remain appropriate in view of the 555 submissions which include a submission from an organisation (details supplied) as stated in her reply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14153/17]

683. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide a list of all the in combination issues that were considered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in its observations dated 13 May 2016 requested by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on an application (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14154/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 680 to 683, inclusive, together.

As previously outlined to the Deputy, my Department, through its National Parks and Wildlife Service, provided observations on the application in question, and I am satisfied that they were appropriate.

My Department noted that the development is unlikely to have a negative interaction with Natura 2000 nature conservation sites due to the nature and location of the works, but set out a number of mitigation measures that should be required to avoid any negative interaction with protected marine mammals, including provision for further consideration of devices which might be deployed in the future.

My Department's role here is to provide advice in relation the conservation of habitats and species as a Statutory Consultee and it has done so. The decision in this matter resides with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and he will have sight of all relevant submissions when making the decision. My Department will provide any further assistance or advice if so requested by him.

Greenways Development

684. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made in discussions between Irish Rail, Fingal County Council and her Department on the provision of a pedestrian and cyclist route along the railway across the Broadmeadow Estuary (details supplied). [14171/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The progression of any proposals in relation to the development of such a pedestrian and cyclist route is a matter, in the first instance, for consideration by Irish Rail and Fingal County Council.

National Gallery

685. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason a decision was made to appoint a director of the National Gallery of Ireland on a permanent basis rather than a contractual basis; and her views on whether this was an appropriate decision. [14175/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In accordance with the Government's policy for appointments at CEO/Director level in State agencies, the Board of the National Gallery of Ireland was given sanction to appoint a Director, on a fixed term basis, for five years. I am advised that the position has been advertised as such.

Departmental Agencies Board Appointments

686. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason the Public Appointments Service was not used when appointing a director of the National Gallery of Ireland and the director of Creative Ireland. [14176/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that due to the level of recruitment currently underway, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) did not have the capacity to manage the recruitment campaign for the position of Director of the National Gallery of Ireland within the timeframe required. To assist in reaching the widest possible audience, PAS did, however, advertise the post on their website. The post of Director of Creative Ireland was filled through lateral mobility by an existing public servant and, therefore, the involvement of the Public Appointments Service did not arise.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme Applications

687. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department has received any application under the built heritage investment scheme or the built heritage jobs leverage scheme from Cork County Council to support work at a location. (details supplied). [14192/17]

688. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if there have been on site inspections of a site (details supplied) since the fire in 2016 in order to ascertain its structural safety; if so, the conclusion; and if not,

her views on whether that would be positive and useful. [14193/17]

689. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has received an application under the structures at risk fund to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts, for a location (details supplied). [14194/17]

690. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has provided any financial assistance to Cork County Council in support of protecting a site (details supplied) since the significant fire in 2016. [14195/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 687 to 690, inclusive, 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.

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 under the Planning & Development and Sanitary Services Acts.

The structure referred to here is listed on the Record of Protected Structures for County Cork. The destruction of the house, which I understand is the subject of a Garda investigation as a criminal matter, is deeply regrettable. Officials of my Department met the local authority in the week following the fire and have been in contact with it again recently.

In relation to financial support for conservation and protection of heritage buildings, this is provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes.

The Structures at Risk Fund (SRF) enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. The closing date for receipt of applications from members of the public for the 2017 Structures at Risk Scheme was 28 February 2017. My Department has not received an application from Cork County Council for assistance under the fund in respect of the structure mentioned.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) is also for the repair and conservation of protected structures. The closing date for local authorities to receive applications from members of the public was 28 February 2017. Applications are currently being assessed in local authorities and my Department does not as yet have details of the projects proposed, so I cannot say whether the structure mentioned has been the subject of an application for assistance under BHIS 2017.

My Department has not received any request for financial assistance from Cork County Council in respect of the structure mentioned since the fire in 2016.

Ministerial Allowances

691. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under her remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14561/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, prior to clarification in recent weeks from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, there were 4 claims for overnight expenses for staying in Dublin, outside of Dáil sitting days, from the current Ministers of State in my Department. Overnight expenses have not been paid since the position was recently clarified with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Home Help Service Provision

692. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to part-time home help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12876/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Commissions of Investigation

693. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the person or bodies at all levels that will be held accountable for the Grace case and the findings of the subsequent Devine and Resilience reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12936/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Commission of Investigation into certain matters relative to a disability service in the South East and related matters i.e. the Commission being established into the care of "Grace" (pseudonym) and others, will be tasked with establishing the facts regarding the role of public authorities in the care and protection of Grace and the other vulnerable individuals who resided with the former foster family.

It is important to emphasise that the Health Service Executive (HSE) has put in place a number of changes in recent years to take account of the service and management deficiencies identified in the Conal Devine report, and in particular the Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse – National Policy and Procedures .

With regard to the HSE's internal human resource (HR) management process into the failings identified in the Devine and Resilience reports, following the publication of the reports all HR matters can now be immediately progressed. As this aspect of the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Commissions of Investigation

694. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if it is the fact that any statement, admission or document given or sent to a commission of investigation is not admissible

as evidence against a person in any criminal or other proceedings except proceedings regarding an offence under section 18; if this will apply to the proposed commission of investigation into the Grace case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13191/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Commission of Investigation into certain matters relative to a disability service in the South East and related matters i.e. the Commission established into the care of "Grace" (pseudonym) and others, is being established under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, which is under the aegis of the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Commissions of Investigation Act contains the following provision, which applies to all Commissions established under the Act:-

19.—(1) None of the following is admissible as evidence against a person in any criminal or other proceedings, except proceedings in relation to an offence against section 18:

(a) a statement or admission made by the person to a commission or to a person appointed under section 8;

(b) a document given or sent to a commission pursuant to a direction or request of the commission to the person;

(c) a document specified in an affidavit of documents made by the person and given to a commission pursuant to a direction or request of the commission.

Abortion Legislation

695. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on the actions of an organisation (details supplied) that has been openly advertising and distributing abortion pills at various locations here contrary to the provisions of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013; the measures he is taking to address this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13401/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 restates the general prohibition on abortion in Ireland while regulating access to lawful termination of pregnancy in accordance with the X case and the judgment of the European Court of Human rights in the A, B and C v Ireland case. Its purpose is to confer procedural rights on a pregnant woman who has a life-threatening condition, so that she can have certainty as to whether she requires this treatment or not. The Act does not regulate the advertising or distribution of medicines.

Abortion Legislation

696. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of all confiscations and seizures of illegal abortion inducing pills over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13402/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority responsible for the regulation of human medicines in Ireland. The HPRA employs enforcement actions, in cooperation with the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána, to identify the unauthorised supply of prescription only medicines, including those containing abortifacients, to the public. The HPRA uses a range of enforcement powers to tackle this activity including seizing product and taking prosecutions.

During the period from 1st January 2012 to 31st December 2016 the total numbers of abortifacient tablets detained were 3,042 Misoprostol tablets and 286 Mifepristone tablets. The breakdown of these per year is as follows:

- 2016: 536 tablets detained from 44 importations. Of these, 436 contained misoprostol and 100 contained mifepristone

- 2015: 850 tablets detained from 81 importations. Of these, 739 contained misoprostol and 111 contained mifepristone

- 2014: 1,017 tablets detained from 60 importations. Of these, 972 contained misoprostol and 45 contained mifepristone

- 2013: 438 tablets detained from 25 importations. Of these, 424 contained misoprostol and 14 mifepristone

- 2012: 487 tablets detained from 25 importations. Of these, 471 contained misoprostol and 16 mifepristone

Water Fluoridation

697. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on fluoride in water and the research the Government relies upon that justifies the use of fluoride in water. [13504/17]

698. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason Ireland is not in the majority of countries that continue to use fluoride in their drinking water systems. [13505/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 697 and 698 together.

The Health (Fluoridation of Water Supplies) Act, 1960 provides for the fluoridation of public piped water supplies. The local authorities, acting on behalf of Irish Water, act as agents for the HSE in providing, installing and maintaining equipment for fluoridation and in adding the fluoride to water and testing the fluoride content of water to which fluoride has been added.

Water fluoridation is the adjustment of the natural concentration of fluoride in drinking water to the optimal recommended level for the prevention of dental caries (tooth decay). Many countries have water fluoridation schemes, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia and New Zealand. Water fluoridation is less common in Europe. However, fluoride is an essential part of oral health policy in all countries in Europe. This can mean fluoridation of salt or provision of community fluoridation through other means.

Water fluoridation is a key element of public health policy in Ireland in the prevention and management of tooth decay.

A research project "Fluoride and Caring for Children's Teeth" (FACCT) is being conducted by UCC and supported by the HSE. Preliminary results indicate that children's oral health has been improving overall since the previous survey of children's oral health in 2002. Fluoridated communities continue to have lower levels of tooth decay than non-fluoridated communities. The results of this research project are due to be published this year.

The Department of Health keeps the policy of water fluoridation under constant review. As part of this ongoing work, a review of evidence on the impact of water fluoridation at its current

level on the health of the population was conducted by the Health Research Board (HRB) on behalf of the Department. This review was published by the HRB in June 2015. The HRB has found no evidence that community water fluoridation is associated with negative health effects.

The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health was established in 2004, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Forum on Fluoridation Report. The Body monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects on health and related matters. It advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, is a safe and effective method of protecting the oral health of the population.

Now that the Forum recommendations have been implemented, I have decided to appoint a new Expert Body on Fluorides and Health with new Terms of Reference. Expressions of interest will be sought in the near future. The Body will have a key role in advising me on all issues relating to the fluoridation of public water supplies and its impact on other aspects of policy.

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors Remuneration

699. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the total cost of the deal reached between the Health Service Executive and the Irish Medical Organisation for the restoration of the living out allowance for non-consultant doctors; the source from which this money will be allocated; if he or the HSE consulted with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12790/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Living Out Allowance was abolished for new entrant non-consultant hospital doctors (Intern, Senior House Officer and Registrar grades) in 2012. Following the agreement reached between the IMO, Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last month, the allowance will be incorporated in to the basic salary of these doctors from 1 July 2017. It is estimated that this will cost approximately €16 million in a full year and €8 million in 2017. This restoration will be implemented and funded in the context of the forthcoming Public Sector Pay Talks.

Hospitals Data

700. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently waiting for ophthalmology assessment in the Mater hospital. [12796/17]

701. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for cataract operations at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital; the current waiting times for cataract patients without admission dates for cataract assessment and cataract operations, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12797/17]

729. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient beds and procedure beds in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital. [12901/17]

730. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of outpatient hospital cancellations and the number of the procedures cancelled for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12902/17]

731. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons outsourced and the procedures for which the persons were outsourced; and the locations the persons were outsourced to from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital in tabular form. [12903/17]

732. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on trolleys in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12904/17]

733. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for each hospital department in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12905/17]

734. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency department attendances for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12906/17]

735. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the capital spend for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [12907/17]

736. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the operational spend at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12908/17]

737. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the total agency staff spend at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12909/17]

738. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of outpatient appointments before cancellations at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12910/17]

739. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the did-not-attend rate in percentages per year at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12911/17]

740. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital implements the SDU and HSE guidelines for did not attends. [12912/17]

741. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital operates or plans to operate a text alert to persons in advance of outpatient department appointments. [12913/17]

742. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of theatres and the number operational at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12914/17]

743. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the age profile of persons attending the emergency department and the reasons for attending at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [12915/17]

744. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that were patients of the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital that were placed in nursing homes in tabular form. [12916/17]

855. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients, both public and private, currently waiting for MRI scans, x-rays, CT scans and PET scans in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital in tabular form; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13391/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 700, 701, 729 to 744, inclusive, and 855 together.

The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to her.

Services for People with Disabilities

702. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork can expect to have an assessment of need carried out. [12810/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

703. **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. [12813/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Reports

704. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health his plans on publishing the primary eye care services report; if he will be publishing a national strategy to deal with the unacceptable levels of ophthalmology waiting lists, particularly with diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration and cataract which are among the worst waiting lists in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12814/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated

€20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF to dedicate €5m to a daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2000 daycases will be managed through this process and outsourcing of treatment will commence from March. The focus of this initiative will be those lists with large numbers of long waiting patients including Ophthalmology.

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 reduce the number of patients 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 shortly.

The HSE is currently finalising the Report of the Primary Care Eye Services Review Group. The overall aim of the Review Group is to shift management of many eye conditions from acute care services to primary care and community services, as appropriate.

Services for People with Disabilities

705. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have an assessment of need; the number of persons currently ahead of them on the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12827/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Eligibility

706. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to grant automatic qualification to a medical card for children in receipt of domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12831/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 was published 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 cur-

rently qualify for a medical card. The legislation is currently being debated by the Houses of the Oireachtas. It is hoped to complete all stages before the end of March 2017.

Pre-registration with the HSE for the DCA medical card will be available from 1st May 2017. This can be done on-line or paper-based. These medical cards will be certified for use from 1st June 2017.

Health Services Provision

707. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the reason a service which had been available to a person (details supplied) for a number of years is no longer available; and if he will arrange to have this service reinstated without delay. [12834/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

708. **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. [12837/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

709. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if home help will be provided to a person (details supplied) who is urgently in need of same. [12841/17]

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 Legal Cases

710. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the amount of money spent by the Health Service Executive in settling legal claims, that is, the total amount of combined settlements; the total amount spent on legal costs regarding incidents at Mayo General Hospital in each of the years 2014 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12844/17]

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 Provision

711. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not being provided with a nurse on call service; his views on whether it is acceptable that the person has remained in hospital for 13 months ready to be discharged but for the availability of the nurse on call hours; if he will compare the cost of keeping a person in hospital for 13 months with the cost of providing adequate home based nurse on call support; the total amount of funding for nurse on call services for each year from 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of persons in receipt of home help hours; the number of hours provided to those persons for each year from 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12845/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

712. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12854/17]

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.

Mental Health Policy

713. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the practice of face down restraint is permitted in HSE-run mental health inpatient units; and if records are kept and collated as to each instance in which face down restraint is used [12857/17]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

714. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if a person that is ordinarily resident here but is currently a student in Hungary can qualify for a medical card; the reason a person studying in Hungary may no longer qualify for a medical card; the frequency with which this person must return home to be considered as ordinarily resident by the Health Service Executive; if it is sufficient to be here approximately five months of the year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12865/17]

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.

National Lottery Funding Applications

715. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the lotto funding available through his Department that a centre (details supplied) can make an application for; the way this application can be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12867/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department no longer operates a National Lottery Fund.

However, the HSE operates a similar scheme and continues to provide grants to health agencies and other organisations from National Lottery funds. Details of the HSE scheme can be found at

http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/natlotterygrants/.

Health Services Funding

716. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the funding made available from his Department and the HSE to a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12868/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

717. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to revisit the decision to cease the public health nurse based in Tipperary town, County Tipperary, from calling weekly to a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12869/17]

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

718. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has to wait 15 months to see an occupational therapist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12873/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

719. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the negotiations his Department is conducting with the relevant stakeholders for the provision of the respreeza therapy for persons suffering from the alpha one deficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12880/17]

980. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons that had been on a compassionate based programme of a drug (details supplied) can now no longer access same; if he will ensure a mechanism is put in place to ensure access is continued for those persons in receipt of the drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14023/17]

981. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status of negotiations with a company (details supplied) further to the decision made not to reimburse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14024/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 719, 980 and 981 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.

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 eats 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.*

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 Leadership 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 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 access scheme, the operation of such schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. As Minister for Health I 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 open

with patients and clinicians from the outset.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

720. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health when the new emergency department will open with regard to University Hospital Limerick; his plans for the recruitment of staff for this unit; the number of staff that will be employed in this unit.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12881/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

721. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on whether to add the free style libre flash glucose monitoring system to the reimbursement list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12884/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Eligibility

722. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card ceased in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12885/17]

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.

Health Services

723. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12886/17]

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 Transfers

724. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is eligible to receive a transfer to Mallow General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12892/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. *Question No. 725 withdrawn.*

Cancer Services Provision

726. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Donegal who have been referred to the northwest radiotherapy unit at the Altnagelvin Area Hospital in Derry to undergo treatment in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12895/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The new North West Cancer Centre at Altnagelvin Area Hospital opened in November 2016 and has commenced providing radiotherapy services to patients. This service offers radiotherapy services closer to home for many patients from County Donegal, reducing their travel time significantly. It is hoped that the new Centre will improve the quality of life of those receiving treatment and that it will also be to the benefit of family members and carers.

A total of 13 patients from County Donegal have been referred to the radiotherapy unit at the North West Cancer Centre to undergo treatment. 6 patients were referred to the service in 2016 and 7 patients have been referred to the service to date in 2017.

The service initially offered radiation therapy to patients with prostate cancer. Radiation therapy for patients with breast cancer is expected to begin shortly, with other cancer types coming on stream on a phased basis over the coming months.

European Health Insurance Card

727. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if an Irish citizen currently studying in an EU-EEA state can use their European Health Insurance Card, EHIC, for medical treatment here; if in Hungary dental treatment is available under the state system, if an Irish citizen's EHIC covers medicines post treatment here and in Hungary while studying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12899/17]

728. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if an Irish citizen currently working in an EU-EEA State can use their European Health Insurance Card, EHIC, for medical treatment here; if an Irish citizen's EHIC covers medicines post treatment here and in Hungary while the person is working in Hungary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12900/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 727 and

728 together.

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.

Questions Nos. 729 to 744, inclusive, answered with Question No. 700.

Medicinal Products

745. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to grant an importation licence for medical cannabis containing THC for a person (details supplied) [12922/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

746. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of social workers who have been investigated and prosecuted to date for operating with the title of social worker but without being registered with CORU since registration became mandatory in 2013. [12924/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In accordance with the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, the Social Workers Registration Board is responsible for ensuring that only suitably qualified and registered health professionals can use the protected title of social worker. Therefore I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the board for direct reply.

Health and Social Care Professionals Registration Boards

747. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE managers that have been disciplined or sanctioned since 2013 as a consequence of a discovery that a social worker or social workers operating under them were not registered with CORU. [12925/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

748. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when surgery will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12934/17]

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

749. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the further measures he is taking to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults in the care of the State in day care settings and residential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12935/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is a priority for the Government. A number of important steps have been taken in recent years to strengthen the protection afforded to vulnerable children and adults in the State's day care and residential care settings. Some of these measures, such as the establishment in early 2014 of the Child and Family Agency, TUSLA, for example, are outside the remit of my Department.

Within the health sector specifically, the Health Service Executive published its national safeguarding policy and procedures, *Safeguarding Vulnerable People at Risk of Abuse,* in December 2014. This safeguarding policy was the first such HSE policy to encompass both elder abuse and concerns of abuse relating to people availing of disability services.

Following on from this policy, a National Safeguarding Committee was formally established in December 2015 with multi-agency and inter-sectoral representation. The Committee is independently chaired by Ms. Patricia T. Rickard-Clarke. It has agreed Terms of Reference but its overarching remit is to support the development of a societal and organisational culture, which promotes the rights of persons who may be vulnerable and safeguards them from abuse. Its remit extends beyond abuse of elderly and disabled persons and recognises that any vulnerable adult can be subject to abuse. Vulnerability can be a transient or permanent state depending on many influences. The Safeguarding Committee published its Strategic Plan for 2017 – 2021 on 20 December 2016. One of its strategic objectives is the initiation of conversations with Government and Oireachtas Committees on the development of legislation on adult safeguarding. The work to date of the National Safeguarding Committee has confirmed that the scope of the issues around the safeguarding of vulnerable adults goes far beyond the area of health and that a much broader, cross-sectoral approach is needed.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Health Act 2007 provided for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), its inspection and regulation of designated centres and the framework for registration of these designated centres. "Designated centre" is the term used in the Health Act 2007 to describe residential centres for (i) people with disabilities, (ii) older people, and (iii) children.

HIQA commenced regulation of residential services for people with disabilities on 1 November 2013. The purpose of regulation is to safeguard and support the delivery of person-centred care to vulnerable people of any age who are receiving residential care services and

to ensure that their health, well-being and quality of life is promoted and protected. There are some 1000 residential centres throughout the country for people with disabilities, of which over 750 have been registered to date by HIQA. HIQA has carried out over 2,700 inspections since regulation began in 2014. By the end of April 2016, every centre for people with disabilities in the country had been inspected at least once, with many being inspected multiple times. The lessons learned from these inspections are continuing to improve the quality of services.

Compliance with HIQA standards for disability residential centres is a requirement under the Service Level Arrangements between the HSE and voluntary service providers. Arising from concerns raised by HIQA in relation to the standards of residential care in some settings, the HSE is currently implementing a comprehensive change programme of measures targeted on improving the quality of residential services for people with disabilities. In addition to implementing its *National Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse,* these measures include:

- A National Implementation Task Force;

- Implementation of an Evaluation and Quality Improvement Programme in disability residential centres;

- Developing a National Volunteer Advocacy Programme in adult disability residential settings; and

- An Assurance Review (McCoy Review) of all the Units in the Áras Attracta facility.

An independent person, Ms. Leigh Gath, has been appointed as Confidential Recipient, to receive concerns of abuse, negligence, mistreatment or poor care practices in the HSE or HSE funded services from patients, service users, families or other concerned individuals and staff.

The HSE is also establishing a National Independent Review Panel with an independent chair and Review Team for disability services. The Review Panel will focus on serious incidents that occur in disability services across the HSE and HSE funded services.

Hospital Appointments Status

750. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite surgery for a person (details supplied) at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12938/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014,* has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

751. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an orthopaedic appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) at University Hospital Waterford. [12941/17]

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

752. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be issued with an appointment to be assessed for hip replacement surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12947/17]

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.

Home Help Service Data

753. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have been approved home help or a home support package but who are currently on a waiting list to receive either due to a lack of available staff, by county. [12948/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

754. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12949/17]

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 Services

755. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not had their x-rays read and was informed that they would not be looked at any time soon. [12953/17]

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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

756. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the change in the type two diabetic test strips reimbursement. [12954/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 Provision

757. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the absence of certain equipment and training to the national ambulance service in County Cork which is critical to the implementation of the clinical practice guidelines in place (details supplied); the steps he will take to rectify this anomaly in the interests of public safety and to allow the staff of the national ambulance service to provide the level of care expected by the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12959/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

758. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will include Crohn's disease and epi pens under the long- term illness scheme. [12962/17]

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

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

Maternity Services Provision

759. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if a clinical director for maternity services has been appointed for the South-South West Hospital Group; the name of that person; if the role is clearly defined with a delegation order or other such official designation; if the role has managerial autonomy in relation to budgetary matters with a clear and distinct operating budget within the South-South West Hospital Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12969/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that Prof John Higgins was appointed Clinical Director of the Women and Children Services Directorate for the South-South West Hospital Group with effect from 27 February last. Prof. Higgins has now assumed clinical and executive responsibility for maternity services in the Group's four maternity hospitals viz Cork University Maternity Hospital, University Hospital Kerry, University Hospital Waterford and South Tipperary General Hospital.

I understand that an Order has been made, under Section 16H of the Health Act 2004, sub-delegating certain functions in relation to maternity services to Prof Higgins. I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to the specific information requested regarding the functions which have been delegated.

Maternity Services Provision

760. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that there is no recorded data of the number of foetal anomaly scans for pregnancies within the South-South

West Hospital Group,SSWHG, and that not all pregnant women presenting to CUMH have access to such scans; and his further views on whether the lack of scanning services and allied datasets presents risks in terms of patient outcomes. [12970/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that foetal anomaly scans are available in all Hospital Groups. Those hospitals/maternity units currently providing anomaly scans accept referrals from other maternity units, if requested. This occurs where the medical team in the referring maternity unit consider that an anomaly scan is clinically indicated.

The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services and, consequently, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the newly established HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme (NWIHP). An early priority for the Programme will be to develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans at 20 weeks. In the meantime, the NWIHP will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability.

One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers. In this context it is expected that the establishment of maternity networks across hospital groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each hospital group can access anomaly scans.

In relation to your specific query regarding recorded data on the number of scans within the South/South West Hospital Group, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

761. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be facilitated with cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12971/17]

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.

Maternity Services Provision

762. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the capital investment allocated into specialised equipment for diagnostics for pregnant women in CUMH over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12975/17]

763. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health when his attention was drawn

to the requests for specialised diagnostic maternity equipment for CUMH; the actions that were taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12976/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 762 and 763 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme has now been established. It is intended that all future development funding for maternity services will be ring-fenced and allocated through the Programme. Therefore all requests for new investment must be prioritised by the Programme in a national context.

In relation to your specific query concerning specialised diagnostic maternity equipment for the CUMH, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Mental Health Services Provision

764. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans for improvement of mental health services in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12979/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

765. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12984/17]

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.

Freedom of Information Requests

766. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the reason his Department has not provided correspondence between him and a person (details supplied) and any other person regarding plans for, discussion of, submissions and the eventual publication of the independent clinical review of provision of a second catheterisation laboratory at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12986/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that work to complete this FOI request is progressing as quickly as is possible and I expect that it will be concluded shortly.

Freedom of Information Requests

767. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if it is it normal practice for a freedom of information request to be three months overdue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12987/17]

768. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the average turnaround time for a freedom of information request sent to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12988/17]

769. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the statutory obligations that pertain to FOI requests and their delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12989/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 767 to 769, inclusive, together.

The statutory obligation, of the Department of Health and all FOI bodies, is to issue a decision, in most circumstances, not later than 4 weeks after the receipt of the request.

If a decision does not issue within the statutory time frame, the records are deemed to be refused and the requester has the right to submit an application for an internal review of the case. An internal review decision should issue within 3 weeks of receipt of the internal review application. If a decision does not issue within the three weeks, the applicant may appeal to the Office of the Information Commissioner.

Information in relation to the average turnaround time for processing FOI requests received in my Department is not available.

Medical Card Applications

770. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12995/17]

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 Equipment

771. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the annual running costs of the mobile MRI scanner unit at South Tipperary General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12996/17]

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 Equipment

772. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the locations of all alliance medical mobile MRI scanner units situated in hospitals in the south east; the annual running costs of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12997/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services

773. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for orthodontic treatment. [13000/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

774. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the orthodontic treatment waiting lists with the Health Service Executive Offaly division. [13005/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Accident and Emergency Departments

775. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to liaise with the Ministers for Finance and Social Protection regarding penalties or programmes for otherwise healthy persons that cost the State money by repeatedly clogging up accident and emergency services through multiple cases of injuries and incoherence arising out of intoxication, which is leading to a reduced service for other more vulnerable persons; if such penalties could include the docking of a portion of social welfare payments or an increased income tax surcharge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13023/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Emergency Departments (ED) provide a 24 hour healthcare service for people, irrespective of the nature of their problem or their social circumstances. ED staff adopt a non-judgmental approach to patients who are intoxicated, misuse substances, have social problems or who may be temporarily unable to look after themselves.

A key challenge in dealing with undiagnosed and acutely distressed patients in an Emergency Department environment is to distinguish between distress that is the result of illness and that which is due to anxiety. This challenge is greater in the case of deciding if someone is simply intoxicated or has a serious medical problem that became manifest after they have been drinking alcohol. The management of patients who have a head injury but also happen/appear to be intoxicated is just one example of why extreme caution and diligence is needed in this area.

It must always be remembered that people who have taken alcohol or other drugs often require medical assistance, either as a direct result of the substances they have taken or because they are more likely to be injured or develop an acute medical complaint.

The docking of social welfare payments or increase tax surcharges as identified by the Deputy are not within the remit of the Department of Health.

Hospital Appointments Administration

776. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the dates and the criteria that will be followed for a person (details supplied) waiting for two hip operations. [13061/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

777. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are data available on patient waiting list numbers and waiting times for a number of procedures (details supplied). [13062/17]

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 Screening Programmes

778. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are data available to support a matter (details supplied) in terms of the number of persons that receive a negative diagnosis from a biopsy, having tested positive with the initial blood test. [13063/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Health Services

779. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are data available on the number of diagnoses of coeliac disease that are confirmed in the absence of such a biopsy, in view of the need to standardise testing and diagnosis protocol. [13064/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Health Screening Programmes

780. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, NICE, guidelines are still the agreed protocols in place for medical management of coeliac disease diagnosis; if so, if there are audit data available on compliance with this best practice approach; and if there are agreed training programmes in place for medical professionals to follow these guidelines. [13065/17]

781. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop a national screening programme for coeliac disease, in view of the potential positive impact that proper diagnosis can have on both the patient and the health service given that potentially one third of persons with coeliac disease have not been diagnosed. [13066/17]

782. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a national screening programme is not under consideration, if a targeted programme will be considered in view of the fact that the likelihood of having coeliac rises to one in ten for blood relatives of those with a positive diagnosis [13067/17]

785. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to an assessment of the long-term value to the health service of establishing a national screening service for coeliac disease for all children (details supplied). [13070/17]

808. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop a national coeliac disease register to identify external contributing factors or to establish possible causation in diagnosis, in addition to any regional variations in the figures for testing, diagnosis and post-diagnosis supports based on availability of financial or medical resources (details supplied). [13201/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 780 to 782, inclusive, 785 and 808 together.

The UK NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) guidelines are the current guidelines in use in Ireland for coeliac disease diagnosis and management. This disease is included in the undergraduate and postgraduate medical training curricula.

Currently, screening for coeliac disease is not routinely carried out. The blood test required is reasonably, but not completely, accurate. This means that routinely screening the entire population could produce a high number of false-positive results. In other words, people would be misdiagnosed as having coeliac disease when they did not have it. Therefore, screening for coeliac disease is usually only recommended for people who are experiencing symptoms of the condition or those with known risk factors for the condition, such as having a family history of the disease.

Those who are offered serological testing for coeliac disease should include first degree relatives of people with coeliac disease. A positive blood test result may give an indication of coeliac disease, but definitive diagnosis requires an endoscopic examination to obtain a biopsy of the small bowel. The diagnosis and treatment of coeliac disease is primarily managed by GPs who are encouraged to follow the NICE UK guidelines in the course of their practice. There is currently no national register of people with coeliac disease in Ireland.

On the question of targeted screening, my Department is aware that the international scientific literature, including a review against the criteria of the UK National Screening Committee, does not support the introduction of such a screening programme.

Health Services

783. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are tools and resources in place to collect, analyse and evaluate data in terms of both patient compliance post-diagnosis, for example, diet, annual testing and so on, and the consistency of post-diagnosis aftercare from medical professionals. [13068/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Health Services Expenditure

784. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are figures available that can quantify the cost to the health service of patient care for those living with coeliac disease, in terms of direct management of those diagnosed as well as the level of potentially avoidable hospital admissions and outpatient treatments in cases in which the primary diagnosis was coeliac disease. [13069/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Question No. 785 answered with Question No. 780.

School Curriculum

786. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there is a plan in place to develop educational supports within junior and senior schools possibly under the CSPE curriculum to support needs (details supplied). [13071/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has been advised by the Department of Education that custom and practice is that schools ask parents before their child enters school, whether primary or post-primary, to inform the school in confidence if there are any medical conditions, allergies etc. that teachers ought to be aware of. Schools then take whatever measures they feel are necessary to cater for the specific needs of the enrolled student, and this can include seeking additional resources where a student's condition requires additional support e.g. physical or learning needs. Children with Coeliac disease would not generally require such extra supports, such as a special needs assistant.

The SPHE syllabus in primary school, particularly in fifth and sixth classes, asks teachers and students to 'explore and examine' some of the illnesses particularly associated with food intake or special health conditions: coeliac, diabetic, anorexia, bulimia, the dietary needs of different age groups and individuals.

In post-primary schools, both the existing SPHE syllabus and new SPHE short course em-

phasise the importance of diet and nutrition to health. They do not insist on coverage of particular conditions and how to approach them, leaving schools the flexibility to look at topics which may be particularly relevant to their students. Given the range of possible conditions and allergies that a large post primary school could have among its student cohort, the emphasis is on promoting holistic understanding of diet and diet-related conditions, while teacher guidelines also focus on broader issues e.g. school canteen food.

It is also important to stress that the optional subject Home Economics can play a significant part in raising awareness of diet and diet-related conditions, at both junior and senior cycles in post-primary schools.

Ultimately, it is expected that parents will provide schools with the appropriate information on their child's condition, allergy or illness, and this can and ought to include any specific advice that teachers need to have in order to support the child. It is equally important to remember that teachers, or other students, are not medics and cannot take the place of qualified medical personnel e.g. administering medicines.

Health Services Funding

787. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review funding or the appropriateness of managing funding for persons with coeliac disease within the disability section of a service rather than a more relevant area such as health and well-being (details supplied). [13072/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

788. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the total saving achieved per annum by removing the cost of gluten free products from medical cards since the cut was introduced in 2012; and his plans to review this policy. [13073/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy directly on the issue of savings.

Gluten-free products have become more widely available in supermarkets in recent years and tend to be significantly cheaper than products sold through community pharmacies. Coeliac patients can also claim medical expenses tax relief on expenditure incurred on gluten-free products manufactured specifically for coeliacs. There are no plans to reinstate these products on the list of reimbursable items under the GMS and other community drug schemes.

Health Services Funding

789. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the criteria for funding voluntary day-care centres; if it is per number of service users or percentage of running costs; if there is a national standard for funding; if not, if there is regional variations; if he has a formal policy

for the funding of voluntary day-care centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13080/17]

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 Staff Data

790. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant neurologists currently employed and serving the north west region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13082/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Medical Card Applications

791. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made in respect of a medical card application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13084/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services

792. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health the status of orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13086/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Governance

793. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of monthly meetings of the HSE's national performance oversight group which have taken place to date and the dates of such meetings. [13088/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As monthly meetings of the National Performance Oversight Group (NPOG) is a Health Service Executive (HSE) operational matter, the question has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff

794. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which any senior manager or CEO of any hospital or hospital group has been brought before the HSE's national performance oversight group for under performance. [13089/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As management of senior managers and Hospital and Hospital Group CEOs by the National Performance Oversight Group (NPOG) is a Health Service Executive (HSE) operational matter, the question has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy

795. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults who have been waiting less than three months, between three and six months, between six and nine months, between nine and 18 months, and greater than 18 months for occupational therapy with occupational therapy services in County Sligo, in tabular form. [13094/17]

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.

Medical Card Data

796. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards as of 1 March 2017; the number of general practitioner cards on the same date; and the number for each type of card issued on a discretionary basis on that date. [13115/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The table displays the number of medical cards as of 1 March 2017. These figures were provided by the HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service to the Department of Health.

Type of Card	Number of cards nationally
Medical Cards (inclusive of discretionary)	1,658,730
GP Visit Cards (inclusive of discretionary)	475,184
Discretionary Medical Cards	118,228
Discretionary GP Visit Cards	35,350

Respite Care Services

797. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite beds and their location in County Kildare for persons with intellectual disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13129/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

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

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

798. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the waiting list for speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy in County Kildare; the length of time the children have been waiting; if measures will be taken to deal with the waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13130/17]

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.

Care of the Elderly Provision

799. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of the Alzheimer's day care centre for south Kildare which is currently being housed in Moore Abbey; if there are plans to move this specific service to Drogheda Street, Monasterevin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13131/17]

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

800. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for a three-year delay in patients being seen by the weight-management multi-disciplinary team in St. Columcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13134/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

801. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of negotiations between his Department and pharmaceutical companies to secure an agreed price for the drug Savitex (details supplied). [13166/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on the reimbursement of approved products in Ireland and suppliers of such products must apply to the HSE for reimbursement approval.

I am advised that, following receipt of an application from the supplier for the inclusion of Sativex on the High Tech Scheme, the HSE assessed the medicine in line with their statutory responsibility. The HSE issued the manufacturers with notice of its intention not to reimburse. It is open to the supplier to make a new application for this product, in the context of the previous findings.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

802. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of regulation for the sale and supply of hearing instruments and hearing assessments; his plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13169/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am having the matters raised by the Deputy examined and I will reply directly to him.

HSE Waiting Lists

803. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults and children currently on HSE waiting lists, by region and county, for hearing assessments and or the fitting of a hearing aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13170/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Waiting Lists

804. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the HSE's plans to reduce waiting lists for hearing assessments and the fitting of hearing aids for both adults and children; if these plans will include a public competitive tender whereby qualified personnel will be a prerequisite; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13171/17]

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 Availability

805. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the addition of the drug Questran light to the GMS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13172/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Maternity Services Provision

806. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the introduction of the anomaly scan at Cavan General Hospital; if it will be available full time at the hospital; the number of days per week it will be available at the hospital; the date for introduction of this service in the last quarter of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13189/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services and, consequently, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the newly established HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme (NWIHP). An early priority for the Programme will be to develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans at 20 weeks. In the meantime, the NWIHP will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability.

One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers. In this context it is expected that the establishment of maternity networks across hospital groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each hospital group can access anomaly scans.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

807. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [13193/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 808 answered with Question No. 780.

EU Directives

809. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in 2016 the EU cross-border health-care directive, which allows Irish citizens obtain treatment in other member states, cost the HSE €2.2 million, an increase of €500,000 on 2015; the detail of the services that were approved since the directive started; the amount that was allocated to mental health under the directive and in particular to residential addiction treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13206/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

810. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment and treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13207/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

811. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 524 of 7 March 2017, the details of the mechanism by which inflation in construction costs from 3% to 9% accounts for a cost increase for the new children's hospital from €404 million in 2012 to over €1 billion currently. [13208/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Final Project Brief for the new children's hospital 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.

I intend to bring a Memorandum to Government in the coming weeks on the new children's hospital, in which details of the costs and funding for the project will be set out. Following consideration of these matters by Government, the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board will be in a position to respond to you directly regarding details of the inflation in construction coats and the impact on the overall project cost.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

812. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question

No. 524 of 7 March 2017, the reason the €605 million estimate for the cost of the children's hospital calculated in 2015 was cited in that response and not the original estimate from 2012, of €404 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13209/17]

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 at St James's Hospital.

€650 million of Exchequer funding was approved in 2014 for the core construction of the new children's hospital together with the two Satellite Centres on the campuses of Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals. This funding was approved following a cost estimate that commenced in 2013 and was completed in early 2014. This relates to the project at the St. James's campus.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

813. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided with a wheelchair which they applied for in January 2017. [13218/17]

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

814. **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. [13222/17]

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.

Psychological Services

815. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that only one child psychologist is employed by the HSE in Cork south to deal with over 200 referrals per year (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13223/17]

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.

Departmental Properties

816. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the public health centre in Knockanana, County Wicklow which has been unused for a number of years; the prospects of it being used for community purposes as proposed by persons (details supplied) who donated the land to the Eastern Health Board for the construction of the health centre in the 1980's; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13228/17]

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.

Health Reports

817. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that 73% of respondents to a research study by an organisation (details supplied) are of the view that drinking to excess is part of Irish culture; the actions his Department will take in view of this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13244/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Drinkaware survey findings reflect the evidence in a previous study 'Alcohol: Public Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours'. The Health Research Board study reported that 85% of respondents believe that the current level of alcohol consumption in Ireland is too high, with 73% believing that Irish society tolerates high-levels of alcohol consumption.

Recent findings suggest that the majority of Irish drinkers engage in excessive or problematic drinking behaviours and that Irish drinkers underestimate their alcohol intake. Ireland's alcohol consumption remains in the top 5 among EU28 Member States. Ireland came fourth among 36 OECD countries for alcohol consumption, after Estonia, Austria and France. Ireland was second in the WHO European Region (which has the highest consumption in the world) in relation to binge drinking with 39% of the population misusing alcohol in this manner at least monthly. This statistic was confirmed by national research through the Healthy Ireland survey, which found that drinking to excess on a regular basis is commonplace throughout the population with almost 4 in 10 (39%) of drinkers binge drinking on a typical drinking occasion and a quarter of them doing so at least once a week. Provisional figures released from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners indicate that our alcohol consumption levels increased in 2016 to 11.46 litres per capita.

It is essential to have a public health policy response which seeks to reduce the number of people engaged in the harmful use of alcohol. The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill contains a package of measures aimed at reducing alcohol consumption in Ireland to 9.1 litres (the OECD average in 2012) per person per annum by 2020, and to reduce the harms associated with alcohol. The Bill includes provisions for:

- minimum unit pricing;

- health labelling of alcohol products;

- the regulation of advertising and marketing of alcohol;

- the regulation of sponsorship;

- separation of alcohol products in mixed trading retail outlets; and

- the regulation of the sale and supply of alcohol in certain circumstances

The Bill along with other measures will bring about a cultural shift in how we view and consume alcohol. As a consequence we will see an improvement in both physical and mental health and wellbeing in the population. The Bill commenced Committee Stage in the Seanad on 26 October 2016, and will resume during this session of the Oireachtas.

General Practitioner Data

818. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of general practitioners in the Ballybrack and Shankill area that have a GMS list and are still accepting new patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13257/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

819. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital beds per 1,000 of the population; if there is data relating to these figures in a comparable context in respect of other OECD countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13265/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As of December, 2016, the Health Service Executive (HSE) data indicate that acute hospital bed capacity numbered 12,644 beds, comprised of 10,507 inpatient and 2,137 day case beds. The most recent bed capacity figures of 2.8 per 1,000 population recorded by the OECD for the Republic of Ireland do not include capacity in private hospitals, unlike figures recorded in many other EU countries. It should be noted that the international definitions of hospital beds do not include day beds.

The Private Hospitals Association estimate the current aggregate bed capacity of their member hospitals at approximately 2,500 beds. Inclusion of private capacity would hypothetically give a figure of approximately 3.2 hospital beds per 1,000 population (a total of just over 15,200), based on the population of approximately 4.76 million recorded by the 2016 Census. The OECD average (based on 2013 figures) is 4.8 hospital beds per 1000 population.

It is important to note that our population is younger than those of European nations with high hospital bed numbers, although numbers of over 65s are increasing at the rate of almost 20,000 per year. This population cohort uses 53% of acute hospital capacity.

In line with the commitment made in the Programme for a Partnership Government, a Bed Capacity Review is underway. The review will be comprehensive and will examine capacity requirements in primary and social care in addition to acute hospitals. It is also intended that private hospitals will come within the scope of the review.

Disability Services Provision

820. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of

needs assessments by assessment of needs officers in areas (details supplied) in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13277/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Reports

821. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the national review of cardiac services will be undertaken; when the terms of reference will be published; the person or body that will be carrying out the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13293/17]

822. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the national review of cardiac services is undertaken if it will be an independent review or an internal HSE review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13294/17]

823. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if cardiologists in the south east will be consulted prior to the completion of the national review in relation to the national review of cardiac services and specifically in relation to UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13295/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 821 to 823, inclusive, together.

It is proposed that a national review of cardiology services will be undertaken this year. This review will seek 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. I expect the review to be completed before the end of the year.

As the review is still in a formative stage, neither the Terms of Reference nor the methodology have yet been determined. However I expect that the views of relevant stakeholders will be sought and considered in the context of the review.

Health Reports

824. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE plans to implement the Herity report in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13296/17]

825. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that persons living in the south east cannot avail of cardiology services at the weekend and after 5 p.m. in the evening until 9 a.m. in the morning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13297/17]

826. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that it is impossible to get from UHW to CUH in 90 minutes by car or ambulance within the 90 minute

timeframe for successful intervention for cardiac arrests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13298/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 824 to 826, 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 also 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. Investment was recommended to enable the hospital to provide additional cath lab capacity.

I accept Dr Herity's findings and recommendations and have provided additional funding of €0.5m for the UHW in 2017 which will enable the hospital to provide 8 hours additional cath labs activity each week. However, in relation to the cessation of PPCI services at the hospital, as Minister for Health, I want to be sure that any service 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. In the meantime, patients in the South East will continue to have access to out of hours PPCI services at Cork University Hospital (CUH) or St James's Hospital, Dublin.

In his report, Dr Herity examined data provided by the National Ambulance Service and determined that the average emergency ambulance journey time from UHW to CUH was one hour and twenty eight minutes. Dr Herity examined actual, real time information, from 36 separate ambulance transfers undertaken between October 2015 and June 2016 and concluded that the 'blue light' journey time from UHW to CUH is less than 90 minutes.

Health Reports

827. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when the planned national review of primary PCI will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13301/17]

828. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the national review into PPCI services will be an independent clinical review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13302/17]

829. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he has identified the person or persons that will conduct the national review of PPCI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13303/17]

834. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if a terms of reference will be drawn up for the national review of PPCI here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13308/17]

835. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the national guidelines that will underpin a national review of PPCI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13309/17]

836. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the consultations that will take place in respect of a national review of PPCI; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[13310/17]

838. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if a national review into PPCI is being undertaken by his department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13312/17]

839. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if an effective catchment population or the actual population of the southeast will underpin the national review of PPCI services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13313/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 827 to 829, inclusive, 834 to 836, inclusive, 838 and 839 together.

It is proposed that a national review of cardiology services will be undertaken this year. This review will seek 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. I expect the review to be completed before the end of the year.

As the review is still in a formative stage neither the Terms of Reference nor the methodology have yet been determined. However I expect that the views of relevant stakeholders will be sought and considered in the context of the review.

Hospital Services

830. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the option of having two distinct PPCI centres here namely a 24-7 service or a 9 to 5 service as per the model of ACS services will remain in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13304/17]

831. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if there are grounds upon which emergency PPCI services will cease at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13305/17]

832. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will rule out ceasing limited PPCI services at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13306/17]

837. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the national review of PPCI services is regarding the way to implement the recommendations of the Herity report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13311/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 830 to 832, inclusive, and 837 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 also 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 and have provided additional funding of €.5m for the UHW in 2017 which will enable the hospital to provide 8 hours additional cath labs activity each week. However, in relation to the cessation of PPCI services at the hospital, as Minister for Health, I want to be sure that any service 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. In the meantime, patients in the South East will continue to have access to out of hours PPCI services at Cork University Hospital (CUH) or St James's Hospital, Dublin.

Hospital Services

833. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons to be treated and the length of time a mobile cath lab will be in place at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13307/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In recent months, the South/South West Hospital Group (SSWHG) has made very significant progress to address waiting list for cardiology procedures at University Hospital Waterford (UHW). Waiting list data, compiled and published by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), provides evidence that the cardiology inpatient/daycase procedure waiting list at the hospital has reduced by over 28% since the end of November, and the number of persons waiting longer than a year has reduced by some 87%. At the end of February 2017, a total of 433 patients remained on the list.

The focus on the UHW cardiology waiting list continues. The SSWHG has a robust plan in place to address the remaining backlog which involves access to cath lab capacity across the region. In addition, as recommended in the Herity Report, an additional €.5m funding has been provided to UHW in 2017, which will enable the hospital to provide 2 additional cath lab sessions (8 hours) per week.

The Deputy may also be aware that I have written to the HSE Director General requesting that consideration be given to a targeted Cardiology Waiting List initiative. Such an initiative would, I envisage, incorporate a range of measures including the sharing of facilities and resources within and between Hospital Groups, the use of any appropriate facilities in the private hospital sector, as well as the deployment of a mobile cath lab. In that context, I expect that the HSE will examine the need to provide a mobile cath lab for a specific period in UHW, having regard to the current waiting list. I look forward to receiving the HSE's proposals in this regard.

Questions Nos. 834 to 836, inclusive, answered with Question No. 827.

Question No. 837 answered with Question No. 830.

Questions Nos. 838 and 839 answered with Question No. 827.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

840. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed [13330/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My officials have checked with the agencies under the aegis of my Department, including the HSE, and each of the agencies has confirmed that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Hospital Appointments Status

841. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the status of a MRI scan for a person (details supplied). [13332/17]

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

842. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) is immediately admitted to the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore to have a procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13345/17]

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.

Accident and Emergency Departments

843. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he has satisfied himself that the various initiatives taken addressing overcrowding at accident and emergency departments throughout the country and especially in counties Sligo and Leitrim are adequate and sufficient to address the issue at present and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13348/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 9 September the HSE launched the 'Winter Initiative Plan 2016-2017' which provided €40 million of additional funding for winter preparedness. This Initiative was developed to manage the expected winter surge in demand for hospital care in an integrated way across Primary, Acute and Social Care.

A range of practical measures to address ED overcrowding were implemented as part of this initiative which delivered; 90 newly-opened additional beds in the Mercy Hospital Cork, University Hospital Galway, the Mater, Beaumont and Mullingar Hospital; and a reduction in

delayed discharges nationally from a high of 659 earlier in 2016 to 565 as of the 14 March, freeing up hospitals beds to alleviate ED pressures. Aids and appliances to over 4,450 patients, as well as around 1,000 additional homecare packages and 615 additional transitional care beds approvals were also provided, all enabling patients to be discharged from hospital sooner.

In additional HSE data, as of 14 March, indicates that approximately 3.5% less patients were waiting on trolleys in the system as compared to the same day last year.

While all hospitals have experienced ED pressures this winter and increased demand for ED services, Sligo University Hospital has been performing better than the national average in terms of patient experience times and trolley numbers, with performance being monitored on a daily basis by the HSE's Special Delivery Unit.

In line with the commitment made in the Programme for a Partnership Government, a Bed Capacity Review is underway. The review will be comprehensive and will examine capacity requirements in primary and social care in addition to acute hospitals. It is also intended that private hospitals will come within the scope of the review.

Regional Health Forums

844. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the standing orders of the regional health forums across the State; the frequency of their meetings; and if he will prioritise a national meeting of regional health forums. [13369/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 42 of the Health Act 2004 provided for the setting up of a system of four Regional Health Forums. The forums were established with effect from 1 January 2006 by The Health Act 2004 (Regional Health Forums) Regulations 2005, SI No. 797 of 2005. Each forum can meet up to six times per year. Each forum can establish two Committees which may meet four times per year. Section 16 of SI No. 797 indicates that subject to the provisions of the Regulations, a Forum shall regulate, by standing orders or otherwise, it's procedure or business and may amend or revoke standing orders.

HSE Staff Data

845. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE staff that have been removed from employment following reviews of services or assessment of practices since 2010. [13370/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Question No. 846 withdrawn.

Primary Care Centres

847. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the designated number of health and social care professionals allocated to the East City Primary Health Centre, Doughiska, Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13377/17]

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.

Primary Care Services Provision

848. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the outpatient services that are available for older persons at the East City Primary Health Centre, Doughiska, Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13378/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres

849. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent staff positions that have been approved for the East City Primary Health Centre, Doughiska, Galway; the number that are actually in position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13379/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres

850. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the catchment area served by outpatient services for older persons by the East City Primary Health Centre, Doughiska, Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13380/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres

851. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the take-up rate for services offered by the East City Primary Health Centre, Doughiska, Galway to older persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13381/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Services

852. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to have a person (details supplied) admitted to the rehabilitation unit in Mullingar, County Westmeath, for necessary rehabilitation treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13383/17]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy

853. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists employed by the HSE that are providing services in Dublin north west and Dublin north central; his views on whether this number is adequate in view of the large waiting list for speech and language therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13389/17]

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.

HSE Staff Data

854. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of vacancies in the HSE that are based in Dublin north west and Dublin north central. [13390/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Question No. 855 answered with Question No. 700.

Maternity Services Provision

856. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently waiting on gynaecological referrals in the Rotunda Hospital, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13392/17]

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

Maternity Services Provision

857. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently waiting for gynaecological surgeries in the Rotunda Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13393/17]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

858. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include, by statutory instrument, persons with severe chronic pain and persons that suffer spasticity from cerebral palsy in accessing medicinal cannabis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13395/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 10 February I published the HPRA's Report "Cannabis for Medicinal 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 and severe, refractory (treatment-resistant) epilepsy that has failed to respond to standard anticonvulsant medications. Patients accessing cannabis through the programme will be under the care of a medical consultant.

The HPRA Report did not recommend the inclusion of chronic pain and spasticity from cerebral palsy conditions for cannabis-based treatments in the access programme. However, this position will be kept under review, and if better clinical evidence becomes available in future, the inclusion of these conditions can be reconsidered.

Medicinal Products

859. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the actions his Department can employ to prevent the dissemination of illegal abortion pills here; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an organisation (details supplied) has been distributing these pills at various locations here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13403/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority responsible for the regulation of human medicines in Ireland. The HPRA employs enforcement actions, in cooperation with the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána, to identify the unauthorised supply of prescription only medicines, including those containing abortifacients, to the public. The HPRA uses a range of enforcement powers to tackle this activity including seizing product and taking prosecutions.

No medicines indicated for the termination of pregnancy are authorised in Ireland. The majority of detentions of medicines containing abortifacients occur at the stage of importation into the State from other countries. While there have been public events relating to the use of abortifacients, supply of such prescription medicines to the public has not, to date, been evident.

Where any person in Ireland is a supplier of any prescription only medicine in contravention of medicines legislation they are committing an offence under Irish legislation and risk enforcement action up to prosecution.

Hospital Waiting Lists

860. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the targets in place for reducing outpatient waiting times in Naas General Hospital in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13404/17]

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

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF to dedicate €5m to a daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2000 daycases will be managed through this process and outsourcing of treatment will commence 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. In relation to targets in place to reduce outpatient waiting times in Naas General Hospital, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services

861. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children that have been refused access to their first choice of general practitioner service for children under six years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13405/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The introduction of GP care without fees to children under 6 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. To date, approximately 94% of GMS GPs have entered into agreements with the HSE for the provision of services to children under 6 and almost 364,000 children under 6 have access to GP care without fees through a medical card or GP visit card.

Complaints in relation to registration with a GP are dealt with by the HSE in the first instance. Where a GMS patient experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the HSE has the power to assign an eligible person to a GP's GMS patient list where the person has been removed from another GP's list or refused entry onto a GP's list, and the person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area, who are contracted to provide services under the GMS.

Parking Charges

862. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the policy of charging cancer patients car parking fees in Naas Hospital will be abolished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13409/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to her**.**

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

863. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13410/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 Applications

864. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application by a person (details supplied); if he will take into consideration the urgency in processing this application due to the fact that the person is applying on a discretionary basis due to their medical condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13418/17]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

865. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 will receive an appointment for speech and language therapy. [13422/17]

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.

Drug Treatment Programmes Availability

866. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the status of a new pilot scheme for an MS drug; the procedure to get on such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13426/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My officials have sought further clarification from the Deputy's office regarding the drug and the scheme in question, and will respond directly to the Deputy once this clarification has been provided.

Health Services Staff Data

867. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the current registered nurse-to-patient ratios and doctor-to-patient ratios, respectively; the safe levels required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13427/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

National Maternity Strategy

868. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of implementing the national maternity strategy; the current funding allocated for same; the funding earmarked to implement it across the next couple of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13428/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Women & Infants Health Programme has recently been established in the HSE and will lead the implementation of Ireland's first National Maternity Strategy - *Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026*. The programme is currently drawing up a detailed action plan for the implementation of the Strategy on a phased basis. This work will include the identification of both capital and revenue funding requirements which will in turn inform the annual Estimates process over the lifetime of the Strategy.

€3 million development funding provided for maternity services in 2016 was allocated in line with the Strategy, and included funding for additional staff, including 100 midwives, the development of specialist bereavement teams and for the implementation of the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System. Increased funding of €6.8m is being provided for maternity services in 2017 which will allow for the continued implementation of the Strategy.

Midwifery Services

869. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the current standard (details supplied) for midwifery staffing; the cost of bringing the current Irish levels in line with this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13429/17]

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 Staff

870. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the current international and best practice standards for consultant obstetricians and gynaecologists; the cost of bringing the current Irish levels in line with this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13430/17]

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 Regulation

871. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the orphan medicinal products regulation; if his attention has been drawn to the monopoly that pharmaceutical companies can hold for orphan medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13431/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Orphan medicinal products are those products intended for the diagnosis, prevention or treatment of life-threatening, or very serious, rare conditions that affect no more than 5 in 10,000 people in the European Union.

EC Regulation No 141/2000 on orphan medicinal products was adopted to encourage the development and authorisation of medicines for rare conditions. The main objective of the Regulation is to ensure that patients suffering from rare conditions have the same quality of treatment as any other patient in the EU, where previously research on such conditions and development of treatments was not considered to be economically viable.

The Regulation lays down a procedure for the designation of 'orphan status' and provides incentives for research and development of such products and placing them on the market.

The European Commission has designated 1825 products in development as orphan medicinal products. Those companies responsible for these orphan medicines can benefit from incentives such as protocol assistance- scientific advice to facilitate the development and authorisation of innovative medicines; 10 years of market exclusivity - where similar medicines for the same condition cannot be placed on the market; and fee waivers for regulatory procedures may also be available.

The number of products available to treat rare diseases remains low but has grown significantly over the years. An assessment of the impact of the European Union's orphan drug regulation 10 years after it was enacted, concluded that it had boosted research and led to the increased availability of drugs to treat rare diseases. To date, the European Commission has authorised 136 orphan medicines for the benefit of patients suffering from rare diseases, whereas before the adoption of the Regulation there were only 8 treatments marketed for rare conditions. The incentives of the orphan drug legislation are therefore essential to facilitate the development of treatments for rare diseases.

In November 2016 the Commission published new guidance on how specific provisions of the Regulation should be applied. This guidance provides procedures and legal predictability for pharmaceutical companies on a number of aspects of the Regulation, including when more than one application for a marketing authorisation for an orphan medicinal product is received for the same condition; and clarity over determinations of significant benefit over existing treatments and similar medicinal products for the same condition.

Prescriptions Charges

872. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of abolishing prescription charges; the estimated cost of lowering the drug payment scheme threshold in €20 intervals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13432/17]

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.

In regards to the estimated cost of lowering the drug payment scheme threshold, 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 Data

873. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the current average cost of a GP visit card; the current average cost of a GP visit card for under six years of age; the current average cost of a GP visit card for over 70 years of age; the current average cost of a GP visit element of medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13433/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The PCRS Financial Management Reports are configured on the basis of age groups. The average cost of a Medical Card and GP Visit Card for the under 6's is included in the 0 - 4 years and 5 - 15 years categories.

The data below represents the relevant indicative annualised costs for the period 2016.

Indicative Annual Cost per card

Age Group	GP Visit Card	GP Visit Card – GP Cost	Medical Card	Medical Card – GP Cost
0 – 4 Yrs	€235	€231	€366	€85
5 – 15 Yrs	€161	€159	€218	€51
Aged 70 and over	€485	€477	€2,128	€494

As the cost of GP Visit Cards and Medical Cards varies significantly with the age of the cardholder, a 'blanket' average cost of either card does not provide a true cost representation.

Hospital Transfers

874. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a person (details supplied) will be transported to Galway university hospital for an emergency procedure if not by the HSE national ambulance service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13434/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service

875. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the reason a concluded review on the HSE's ambulance service handling a 999 call on 28 October 2010 (details supplied) will not be published by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13435/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services

876. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will encourage the HSE to support the innovative plan put together by the general practitioners in Thurles, County Tipperary to maintain the patient list of a retiring general practitioner (details suppled) as a separate practice, in view of the fact the general practitioners are unable to facilitate the HSE's plan to divide the patient list with the other general practitioners in the town due to over capacity in their practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13448/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services Provision

877. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the progress in the sourcing of a replacement general practitioner for the retiring general practitioner in Cappawhite, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13451/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services

878. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in negotiations with general practitioners that will see the problem of replacing retiring rural general practitioners resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13452/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to ensuring that patients throughout the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly-qualified GPs.

The development of a new modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process. Previous engagements have resulted in a number of service developments including the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult patients with Type 2 Diabetes, an enhanced support framework for rural GPs, and a revised list of special items of service under the contract to encourage the provision of more services in the primary care setting. These measures, combined with the under-6s and over-70s universal GP care initiatives, have increased the financial support for general practice.

The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way. The GP contracts review

process will seek to arrive at further measures aimed at making general practice an attractive, fulfilling and rewarding career option into the future.

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

879. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a single property to accommodate a children's health facility, at which a school age team would deliver services, at the HSE's preferred location in Roscommon town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13457/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Data

880. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the current cost of accommodating children's health services in Roscommon town at the multiple sites in which services are currently being delivered by school age teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13458/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

881. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to add pain amplification syndrome and chronic fatigue to the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13466/17]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

882. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the resources he is providing to assist persons with Prader-Willi syndrome and their carers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13467/17]

884. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to involve persons with Prader-Willi syndrome in service planning (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13470/17]

886. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide more specialist dietetic services for persons with Prader-Willi syndrome (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13472/17]

887. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide specific residential care places for persons with Prader-Willi syndrome (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13473/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 882, 884, 886 and 887 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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

883. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of mental health teams to assist persons with Prader-Willi syndrome (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13468/17]

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.

Question No. 884 answered with Question No. 882.

Medical Card Eligibility

885. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the provision of medical cards for persons with Prader-Willi syndrome (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13471/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her

overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the person claiming the allowance's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. In certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information and documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

The HSE has a system in place for the provision of medical cards in response to an emergency situation for persons with a serious medical condition in need of urgent or on-going medical care that they cannot afford and persons in palliative care, who are terminally ill. With the exception of terminally ill patients, all medical cards, granted on an emergency basis, are issued on the basis that the patient is eligible for a medical card on the basis of means or undue hardship, and will follow up with a full application within a number of weeks of receiving the medical card eligibility. These cards are issued within 24 hours of receipt of the required patient details and a letter which confirms the medical condition from a doctor or consultant.

In addition, Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 was published 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, which, in turn, may benefit those children with Prader- Willi Syndrome. Any child with Prader-Willi Syndrome, whose Guardian is in receipt of a DCA payment for them, will be eligible for a medical card upon enactment of the legislation. It is expected that this will be in place for 1st June 2017.

Questions Nos. 886 and 887 answered with Question No. 882.

Hospital Appointments Status

888. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [13481/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

889. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a primary health care centre (details supplied) in Dublin; the timeline for its construction and completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13482/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It was intended that this primary care centre would be one of the locations to be delivered through the PPP project. While planning permission has been awarded, unfortunately this location was one of two locations which did not complete the planning process within the timeframe for inclusion in the PPP project.

Delivery of primary care infrastructure is a dynamic process, constantly evolving to take account of changing circumstances including the feasibility of implementation. While the Government's objective is to deliver a high quality, integrated and cost effective health care service the mechanism and timescale for delivery of primary care centres is dependent on a number of factors. Some of these factors are outside the control of the Health Service Executive. Regardless of the delivery mechanism, all potential primary care infrastructure is subject to suitable locations being offered/provided/available, to successful planning processes and GP commitment to sharing accommodation and delivering health care services with HSE staff. In addition the operational lease mechanism is subject to market pressures such as the developers' access to adequate financing.

Future investment in healthcare infrastructure must be considered within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. 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. During 2017 my Department will work with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to conduct a mid-term review of the capital programme.

Long Stay Residential Units

890. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will have a long-term stay bed made available to a person (detail supplied) in County Cork. [13486/17]

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.

General Practitioner Services

891. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the proposal from general practitioners in Thurles, County Tipperary to replace a general practitioner that is due to retire very soon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13488/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

892. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no physiotherapist in a school (details supplied) since September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13490/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Ministerial Meetings

893. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he has met with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, including representatives of individual companies, in the past year; if the Cannabis for Medicinal Use Regulation Bill 2016 was discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13492/17]

1002. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he, or officials of his Department, have met with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry or other interested parties to discuss the Cannabis for Medicinal Use Regulation Bill 2016; if so, if there are minutes of these meetings; if so, the outcomes of such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14093/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 893 and 1002 together.

I, and my officials, do on occasion meet representatives of the pharmaceutical industry including individual companies. The Cannabis for Medicinal Use Regulation Bill 2016 has not been discussed at any of these meetings.

Hospital Services

894. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the consultations he has had on the development of MRH Portlaoise emergency department; the consultations he has had regarding 24-7 mental health cover, including CAMHS, to MRH Portlaoise emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13493/17]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

895. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the actions being taken (details supplied) to resolve the respite issues of disabled children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13495/17]

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 servic-

es 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.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

896. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be provided to an organisation (details supplied) in order to allow it to recruit a person, who was appointed pending funding, for the position of enhanced home care support officer in the north-west region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13503/17]

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 (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

897. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE is now requesting weekly travel receipts from students that are attending third level overseas (details supplied) in the assessment of their medical card application, in view of the fact that they remain citizens of the State and return home outside of term time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13511/17]

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.

National Children's Hospital Location

898. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding the logic to developing the new children's hospital, without ensuring the co-location of the new maternity hospital, in view of the scientific evidence which exists of the need to co-locate and the particu-

lar unsuitability of the St James's site for those purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13515/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As announced in June 2015, the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital will relocate in time to the St James's campus, achieving tri-location of adult, paediatric and maternity services. The National Maternity Strategy, published in January 2016, reaffirms the delivery of tri-located maternity services on the campus with the new children's hospital and St James's Hospital.

A site for the proposed maternity hospital is identified in the Site Master Plan for the St James's campus, and the new children's hospital design has incorporated the required operational links with both maternity and adult hospitals.

A planning application has not yet been submitted in relation to the relocation of the Coombe Maternity Hospital to the St James's Hospital Campus. While the construction of the new maternity hospital on the campus will not commence until the new children's hospital is completed, consideration will be given to the work required to advance the new maternity hospital design, which must be done before a planning application is prepared.

Occupational Therapy

899. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can access an appointment with an occupational therapist to assess accommodation needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13526/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

900. **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. [13530/17]

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.

Ministerial Meetings

901. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health further to the meeting that took place on 6 December 2016 with a person (details supplied), if he will contact the person directly and outline any steps that have been taken since the meeting took place in relation to the primary medical certificate assessment criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13531/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme, which is operated by the Revenue Commissioners, is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. To qualify for the scheme, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations Act 1994 and be in possession of a primary medical certificate. The Deputy will be aware from the meeting I had with him on the 6th December, 2016, that the medical criteria for a primary medical certificate are set be the Department of Finance. While applications for primary medical certificates are processed through the Health Service Executive (HSE) Local Health Offices, HSE personnel have no role in setting or amending the criteria.

I can assure the Deputy that my office will contact the person concerned in the coming days.

Disabled Drivers Grant

902. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to grant funding for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13532/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department does not provide funding towards the purchase of a car.

The Deputy may be interested to note that the Revenue Commissioners operate the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. To qualify for the scheme, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations Act 1994 and satisfy a range of conditions. Details of the scheme can be found on www.revenue.ie.

Child Abuse Reports

903. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of allegations of sexual abuse made to the HSE or the previous health boards by persons that were fostered or by their families in respect of time spent at a foster home, with the exception of the specific home in the south east which is now the subject of a commission of investigation for each year since 1990; when the allegation was made for each case; the action that was taken; if the allegation was referred by the HSE or health board to the Garda; the outcome of any internal HSE or health board investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13540/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter may be more appropriately answered by my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I am liaising with Minister Zappone on this issue and depending on the outcome of these discussions the matter will be referred to either Tusla or the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Procedures

904. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have an urgent date provided for a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13548/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Data

905. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the length of time persons have to wait from general practitioner referral for an appointment for initial examination and breast screening check at the Mater Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13558/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Comprehensive symptomatic breast services are available for women in the eight designated cancer centres. These centres, together with a satellite centre in Letterkenny, provide a range of services, including for women who have been referred by their general practitioner. National key performance indicators have been set in relation to waiting times for women referred to these clinics. The target is to see 95% of urgent referrals within two weeks, and 95% of non-urgent referrals within 12 weeks.

In 2016, the symptomatic breast disease clinic at the Mater Hospital saw 99% of urgent referrals within two weeks, and 64% of non-urgent referrals within 12 weeks.

Separately BreastCheck, the national breast screening programme, provides free mammograms to all women aged 50-64 every two years and is available nationwide. It is currently being extended to women aged 65-69.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

906. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if there is a grant available to help persons with sight issues to purchase equipment (details supplied). [13574/17]

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 Funding

907. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding that has been provided by his Department or agencies under its remit to individual local authorities for

the provision of life-saving equipment such as defibrillators, in tabular form for each of the past six years; the level of funding sought by local authorities over the corresponding period; his plans in relation to this area of safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13581/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This year, the Health Service Executive established an Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering Group. The purpose of this project is to improve survival rates for those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest through the development and implementation of an out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy. This work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responder Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA).

Both the NAS and CFR Ireland are working with other partners to enable a sustainable response to such events.

The HSE National Community First Responder framework for Ireland declared that CFRs offer a valuable and complementary resource to emergency ambulance provision, positively impacts NAS response time and achieves improved survival for OHCA. It demonstrated how the NAS and CFR Ireland intend to consolidate, enhance and implement further CFR schemes over the next five years through a National Community First Responder Framework. Its ambitions over the next few years include increasing the availability of training in CPR in schools, work places and local groups and making Public Access Defibrillators more easily accessible with people knowing how to use them. It also aims to:

- Work in partnership with all relevant organisations (statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors) to increase the availability of Public Access Defibrillators

- Put in place effective arrangements to ensure that Public Access Defibrillators are mapped, maintained and accessible to the public

- Commence a public awareness campaign to increase the level of provision of CFR Schemes in geographical areas of priority.

And so one of the means to help improve outcomes in this area is CFR groups. These are people from local communities who are trained in basic life support and the use of defibrillators that attend a potentially life threatening emergency in their area. They are then able to provide an early intervention in situations such as heart attack or cardiac arrest by providing, among other things, resuscitation and defibrillation.

Cardiac First Responders (CFR) Ireland, launched in 2015, is the national umbrella organisation for Community First Responders Groups. CFR Ireland works with the National Ambulance Service, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and the Centre for Emergency Medical Science UCD. Both the NAS and CFR Ireland currently support over 145 Community First Responder schemes throughout Ireland, who train community members to provide emergency care support.

If an emergency 999/112 call for cardiac arrest, choking, chest pain or breathing difficulties is made to the National Ambulance Service in an area where a CFR group is established, the on-duty CFR member gets a text from the National Ambulance Service at the same time that an ambulance is despatched with location and call details. The First Responder then goes straight to the scene and administers initial care (defibrillation if required) until the National Ambulance Service Emergency resources arrive.

National Lottery funding has been in the past the means of my Department to provide funding along the lines referred to by the deputy. However, applications for this funding stream have been primarily from individual groups in the local community and not local authorities.

The question of such funding from the HSE is a service matter so I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

908. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if he will approve funding for a person (details supplied) that has been accepted into a facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13602/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

909. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a medical card by a 21 year old full-time student living at home with their parents is assessed on household income or only on the income of the student; his plans to revise policy in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13603/17]

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.

Health Insurance Cover

910. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take regarding insurance companies refusing to provide cover for neurological paediatricians prescribing medicinal cannabis; the way he will deal with this matter in new legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13615/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have not received any reports from hospital consultants regarding insurance companies refusing to provide cover for neurological paediatricians prescribing medicinal cannabis.

Under existing arrangements consultants in public hospitals are covered by the Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) in respect of the prescription of THC-based medicines for a patient under their care provided that the consultant is permitted to do so under a licence granted by the Minister for Health under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

In relation to private consultants the CIS covers the excess over the indemnity ceilings (or Caps) set by the State for private indemnifiers of consultants working in private practice settings. Effectively, the private indemnifier's liability in respect of any claim is capped at the relevant indemnity ceiling and the State assumes responsibility for any amount in excess of the cap. Consultants in private hospitals should check with their Medical Defence Organisations to establish that such organisations will cover them up to the Caps limit in cases where they are considering prescribing THC-based medicines for a patient, under licence from the Minister and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

Medicinal Products Licensing

911. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if any person that has applied to his Department regarding the new cannabis legislation succeeded in getting the required drug to treat epilepsy or Dravet syndrome; if so, the name of the consultant involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13616/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): To date, only one licence for cannabis-based product containing THC has been issued. As you will know it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases, and the information supplied in any application is confidential.

Health Services Staff Training

912. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the sponsorship of nursing and midwives third level education initiatives is still available within the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13618/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to thank the Deputy for the matter raised.

Given that this is an operational matter, it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the HSE. I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for attention and direct reply within 10 working days.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

913. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will request that South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital refer a person (details supplied) for treatment in a private hospital via the National Treatment Purchase Fund once the next funding initiative to the hospital has been sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13626/17]

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 Procedures

914. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that the next appointment for surgery will take place in respect of a person (details supplied); and the way the person can receive priority surgery. [13627/17]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

915. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when the next initiative of National Treatment Purchase Fund funding will be made available to South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital, Cork, for persons listed on the inpatient day case ophthalmology waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13631/17]

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

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF to dedicate €5m to a daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2000 daycases will be managed through this process and outsourcing of treatment will commence from March. The focus of this initiative will be those lists with large numbers of long waiting patients including Ophthalmology.

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 reduce the number of patients 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 shortly.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

916. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the National Treatment Purchase Fund €5 million funding that has been provided to the South-South West Hospitals Group for the day case waiting list; the number of patients that have had procedures from this hospital; the amount of funding provided to this hospital that is remaining and of the excess of 2000 daycases across the country managed through this process; the number that are patients from South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital and of these the number that are ophthalmology patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13633/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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. The focus of this initiative will be those lists with large numbers of long waiting patients including Ophthalmology.

In excess of 2000 daycases will be managed through this process and the NTPF has indicated that outsourcing of treatment will commence shortly. As part of this Daycase Waiting List Initiative, the NTPF will be in a position to report on the numbers of patients treated under the Initiative, including by Hospital Group.

Hospital Appointments Status

917. **Deputy Gerry Adams** 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. [13636/17]

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

918. **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. [13640/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

919. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services service will be provided to a person (details supplied); the provision made to ensure that all young persons requiring urgent and comprehensive services are provided with them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13649/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

920. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount of public money spent in each of the past five years in respect of treatment in hospitals by the Health Service Executive (details supplied); if these hospitals have entered contracts with the National Treatment Purchase Fund for taking patients off waiting lists; the other funding that has been given to this hospital group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13650/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the NTPF, the total amounts paid to the Bon Secours Hospitals by the NTPF from 1 Jan 2012 to date is presented in the table. All Bon Secours hospitals are on the current list of authorised hospitals for the purposes of NTPF commissioning plans for 2017.

Bon Secours Location	Total NTPF Funding
Dublin	€2,024,311.75
Cork	€3,602,506.32
Galway	€1,590,790.50
Tralee	€1,551,508.30

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

Departmental Funding

921. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of all State funding allocation in relation to AIDS/HIV prevention to LGBT and non-LGBT organisations over the past ten years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13651/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

Hospital Waiting Lists

922. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to address the growing waiting times in Naas hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13655/17]

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

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

In relation to the steps being taken to address waiting times in Naas Hospital, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Records

923. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide medical assessment records in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry in view of the fact person has experienced difficulty accessing their own records; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13662/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

Medical Card Applications

924. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to have a decision made in respect of a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13663/17]

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 specifi-

cally 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 Procedures

925. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have surgery. [13666/17]

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

926. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 446 of 13 December 2016, if he will ensure that a final reply is issued as soon as possible in view of the fact no response has been issued from the Health Service Executive despite several requests to his office. [13670/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am having this matter raised by the Deputy examined and I will reply directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

927. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health when the position of the sarcoma specialist at St. Vincent's Hospital will be filled; the current status of the recruitment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13703/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has advised that interviews for the position of consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma in St. Vincent's University Hospital took place last week, and that a successful candidate has been identified.

Hospital Procedures

928. **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. [13709/17]

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

929. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the reason funding was refused by the Health Service Executive to supply a nurse to a person (details supplied) who has been out of school since February 2017. [13711/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Data

930. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided by the Health Service Executive for each of the years 2011 to 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13725/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

931. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason long term illness benefit is cut off at 16 years of age for mental illness but not for other illnesses; the reason the medical card is withdrawn for persons suffering from mental illness at the age of 16 but not for other illnesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13730/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the scheme are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus;

and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

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

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

Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. It should be noted, in certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Hospital Procedures

932. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have surgery arranged. [13741/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Expenditure

933. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to alter the living donor reimbursement scheme in order that stay at home parents would be compensated for child care costs which will ensue as a result of their recuperation from their operation and therefore ensure that there is not a financial disincentive with such activity; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [13743/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Policy for the Reimbursement of Expenses of Living Donors provides for the reimbursement of accommodation and travel expenses incurred by living kidney donors up to a maximum of €6,000. In addition, the scheme reimburses loss of earnings incurred by salaried/waged donors and self-employed donors for up to 12 weeks after the donation, up to a maximum of €6,000.

This policy was introduced in 2014 and a review of the provisions of the policy was undertaken last year. There are no plans to further alter the scheme.

Health Services Provision

934. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13749/17]

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 Delays

935. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent hospital appointment in the neurology department will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13751/17]

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.

Written Answers Nos. 936-956

Services for People with Disabilities

936. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the 33 residential centres run by St. John of God for persons with disabilities that are currently deemed by HIQA to be non compliant with regulations, in tabular form. [13752/17]

937. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken by the Health Service Executive to ensure that the 33 residential centres run by St. John of God for persons with disabilities are operated on a basis that is compliant with HIQA regulations. [13753/17]

938. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the funding that has been provided in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by his Department and the HSE to St. John of God to provide services to persons with disabilities. [13754/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 936 to 938, inclusive, together.

Saint John of God Community Services Limited (SJOG) operates HSE funded services across intellectual disability, adult mental health and child and adolescent psychiatry. It supports over 6,800 children and adults annually with over 3,000 staff and volunteers. In intellectual disability services, SJOG provides day services for over 2,200 children and adults, residential services for over 900 children and adults, and respite services for over 750 service users.

I understand that the service provider is currently in an escalation process with HIQA owing to non-compliance with national standards in a number of facilities and serious concerns being raised by the regulator in terms of the organisation's capacity to effectively govern and deliver safe services for people with a disability.

Non-compliance with national standards can range from relatively minor issues that have a minimal impact on the care and welfare of residents to significant incidents of major non-compliance. I understand that HIQA's ongoing discussions with SJOG are focused on a small number of designated centres with major issues of non-compliance. At the same time, I can confirm that there are 79 SJOG designated centres currently recorded as being inspected by HIQA. As it takes an average of four to five months from date of inspection to date of publication, only data up to October 2016 has been analysed to date. 45 of the 126 inspections of SJOG centres carried out between January 2015 and October 2016 achieved above 75% overall compliance, of which 16 inspections achieved 100% compliance.

The St. John of God Services are funded by the HSE under Section 38 of the Health Act, 2004. Services are provided through a Service Arrangement which is signed on an annual basis and reviewed continually. The SJOG receives significant funding from the HSE as highlighted in the table below and is scheduled to receive €134,299,012 in 2017:

Year	Disability Services	Mental Health	Total
2011	€106,436,289	€22,684,059	€129,123,348
2012	€104,575,670	€21,376,411	€125,952,081
2013	€102,723,834	€21,483,070	€124,206,904
2014	€100,112,012	€21,479,230	€121,591,242
2015	€103,817,057	€21,479,230	€125,300,887
2016	€109,811,678	€22,530,819	€132,342,497

The HSE is committed to working with all agencies to improve compliance in voluntary

and statutory service providers in respect of the National Standards for Residential Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities.

As the particular issues raised by the Deputy are service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

939. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the dementia services available for the under 65s nationally and specifically in the Dublin South West constituency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13755/17]

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 Procedures

940. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be admitted to hospital for a procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13757/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

941. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if any adult cystic fibrosis, CF, patients were accommodated in wards within University Hospital Limerick other than in the CF unit since the unit opened; if so, the length of time they were in the non-CF unit; if there was a room available in the CF unit at the time; the breakdown of CF versus non-CF patients in the unit at the time; if adult non-CF patients have been admitted to the CF unit ahead of CF patients since the opening of the CF unit; if adult CF patients been moved out of the CF unit; if so, the reason they were moved; if there was accommodation in the adult CF unit when they were moved; and if their room or bed in the adult CF unit was taken by a CF or non-CF patient. [13760/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Primary Care Centres

942. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the works to be carried out at a health centre (details supplied) are significant; if it will affect the services provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13763/17]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

943. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding making translarna available through the general medical scheme scheme following additional data which has been given to the Health Service Executive; the position regarding the drug being made reimbursable following submissions of additional data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13770/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

944. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in implementing the recommendations contained in chapter five of the review of the nursing home support scheme and, specifically, work done in implementing recommendations 7 to 9 that deal with additional charges imposed by private nursing homes on fair deal residents. [13772/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for people who require long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;

- Bed and board;

- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living; and

- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home.

Although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, e.g. social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing. In recognition of this, anyone in receipt of financial support under the NHSS retains at least 20% of their income. The minimum amount that is retained is the equivalent of 20% of the State Pension (Non-Contribu-

tory). An operator should not seek payment from residents for items which are covered by the NHSS, the medical card or any other existing scheme.

Part 7 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract in writing with each resident on their admission to the nursing home. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. Residents should never be charged fees which are not set out in the contract. The Department of Health and the HSE are not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home.

Registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective complaints procedure. Concerns about additional charges should in the first instance be taken up with the nursing home provider. The Office of the Ombudsman can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

Medical Card Data

945. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which a person (details supplied) in County Sligo has access to a medical card to cover costs associated with treatments prior to March 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13792/17]

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 have advised that if the person was not covered by a medical card in the time that the treatments were administered, the person is not eligible for a refund of costs endured.

However, the person may also be able to claim tax relief on the cost of 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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

946. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of women that have availed of the screening for cervical cancer in each the years 2010 to 2016. [13803/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to her.

Vaccination Programme

947. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the age groups that receive the free meningococcal B vaccine; his plans to extend the free meningococcal B vaccine to all

children; if his attention has been drawn to the fact the vaccination costs up to €270 to receive it outside the public health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13811/17]

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 MenB 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. Children born on or after 1 October, 2016 are now receiving the MenB vaccine at 2, 4 and 12 months of age. 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. Those who have a medical card are eligible to have the vaccine administered by their GP free of charge. However the purchase of the vaccine is not covered by the medical card scheme. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make the vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

Health Services Provision

948. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health when a €75 public charge was introduced for an appointment for necessary chemotherapy treatment; and if this is a policy of any hospital that provides this necessary public health service. [13812/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. As provided for by the Health (Amendment) Act 2013, the current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €80 per night, subject to a maximum of €850 in any twelve consecutive months.

These Regulations also underpin charges for persons admitted to hospital as a day case, i.e. the public in-patient charge also applies to in-patient day cases. On this basis, where chemotherapy is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

949. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health further to parliamentary question numbers 499 and 500 of 14 February 2017 the reason Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, do not submit their inpatient cancellation data to the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF; the reason Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, do not submit their outpatient cancellation data to the NTPF; if Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, collect data relating to inpatient and outpatient hospital cancellations; if not, the reason; the barriers to the collection of this data; the proposed plans to start collection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13817/17]

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

950. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number and which hospitals do not collect inpatient and outpatient cancellation data; the reason this data is not being collected; if there are plans to start the collection of this data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13818/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

951. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the information relating to waiting lists which exists for Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, in view of problems with data collection at these hospitals; the types of data currently being recorded in respect of inpatient and outpatient lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13819/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

952. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the IT systems in use at Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; the waiting list and data collection systems in use at Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if the systems currently in use at these hospitals are up to modern standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13820/17]

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

953. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of all meetings between his Department and Nursing Homes Ireland from 2011 to date, in tabular form. [13821/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Since 2011 officials from the Department have met regularly with various stakeholders, including Nursing Homes Ireland, both formally and informally. During that period meetings with NHI have discussed a wide range of issues including the review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, funding of Long Term Care, residential care standards, recruitment and workforce planning. NHI was also represented on Working Groups chaired by the Department which considered the Care and Welfare Regulations and Towards a Restraint Free Environment in Nursing Homes. In November 2016 NHI presented to the Interdepartmental Working Group established to oversee certain recommendation contained in the Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. My Department does not maintain a register of formal and informal meetings with stakeholders, such meetings are typically part of the normal course of business, across a wide variety of

issues.

As Minister with responsibility for Older People, I met with representatives from NHI in July 2016. I also invited them to participate in meetings I had in September 2016 and January 2017 with older persons' representative groups.

Nursing Home Services

954. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of all meetings from 2011 to date between the National Treatment Purchase Fund and Nursing Homes Ireland in tabular form. [13822/17]

955. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of all meetings from 2011 to date between the National Treatment Purchase Fund, Health Information and Quality Authority and Nursing Homes Ireland, in tabular form. [13823/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 954 and 955 together.

Both the Health Information and Quality Authority and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are independent in the performance of their functions. The Department of Health does not maintain a register of meetings either agency would have with various third-party stakeholders.

Services for People with Disabilities

956. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate funding to service providers that accommodate children with disabilities moving into adult services; if so, when this funding will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13825/17]

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. The commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities. With regard to the provision of day services for school-leavers with disabilities, the Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to ensuring that all 18 year old school leavers with intellectual and physical disabilities have continued education or training opportunities. Many of these young people will progress to mainstream education, training or employment but others will require continuing HSE-funded support services.

The process of meeting the needs of around 1,500 school leavers and Rehabilitative (Lifeskills) Training graduates who require a HSE-funded day service in 2017 has commenced and has been further refined building on the learning from the 2016 planning process. To ensure that needs are met, additional funding of €10 million is being allocated by the HSE to provide appropriate services and supports. A standardised process for the identification of support needs has been put in place and a profiling exercise has commenced with each individual in order to ascertain their needs and preferences. It is intended that families and service users will be notified by the end of May of the placements which will be made available to them.

Hospitals Capital Programme

957. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Susie Long project planned for St Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny; if the HSE plans to provide funding for the project; the section within the HSE that is tasked with the delivery of the project; if he has a timeframe in place within which the project will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13834/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

958. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if angiogram services will be provided at St Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny, in view of the number of persons from the area who must travel to Dublin for the service and the poor public transport system available to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13837/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

959. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the current status on the provision for a second cath lab at WUH; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13838/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that, in his review of cath lab services in University Hospital Waterford (UHW), Dr Niall 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.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

960. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding made available to each local and regional drug task force for each year from 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13863/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The budget allocation for the twenty four Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces from the Drugs Initiative of the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive in each of the years referred to by the Deputy is set out in the table:

LDATF	2012	2013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE
Ballyfermot	€1,569,489	€1,522,404	€461,150	€1,025,582	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286
Ballymun	€1,180,695	€1,145,274	€632,817	€488,098	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957

LDATF	2012	2013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE
Blanchard-stown	€1,124,343	€1,090,613	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589
Bray	€1,573,101	€1,525,908	€573,860	€916,271	€573,860	€916,271	€573,860	€916,271	€573,860	€916,271
Canal Com-munities	€1,562,243	€1,515,376	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309
Clondalkin	€1,421,577	€1,428,930	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948
Cork	€1,578,581	€1,531,224	€411,988	€1,108,299	€411,988	€1,108,299	€411,988	€1,108,299	€411,988	€1,108,299
Dublin 12	€1,120,360	€1,086,749	€74,013	€990,134	€70,997	€993,150	€70,397	€993,750	€70,397	€993,750
Dublin NE	€1,228,782	€988,234	€422,251	€594,836	€422,251	€594,836	€239,971	€777,116	€239,971	€777,116
Dún Laoghaire	€926,167	€898,382	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755
Finglas Cabra	€936,590	€908,492	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960
NIC	€2,369,624	€2,298,535	€576,956	€1,652,623	€494,856	€1,734,723	€394,856	€1,834,723	€394,856	€1,834,723
SIC	€2,161,821	€2,096,966	€255,720	€1,788,337	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014
Tallaght	€1,250,347	€1,262,837	€452,712	€782,240	€341,438	€893,514	€336,022	€898,930	€336,022	€898,930
Total	€20,003,720	€19,299,924	€5,125,444	€13,823,981	€4,433,814	€14,515,611	€4,145,518	€14,803,907	€4,145,518	€14,803,907
RDATF	2,012	2,013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE
East Coast Area	€851,596	€584,227	€58,200	€508,500	€58,200	€508,500	€58,200	€508,500	€58,200	€508,500
Midland	€849,513	€824,028	€307,810	€491,497	€136,816	€662,491	€136,816	€662,491	€136,816	€662,491
Mid-West	€1,496,428	€1,451,535	€147,982	€1,260,007	€147,982	€1,260,007	€147,982	€1,260,007	€147,982	€1,260,007
North East	€986,091	€956,508	€0	€927,813	€0	€927,813	€0	€927,813	€0	€927,813
North West	€765,610	€742,642	€272,485	€447,878	€258,633	€461,730	€258,633	€461,730	€258,633	€461,730
North Dublin	€826,087	€801,304	€456,080	€321,184	€309,778	€467,486	€266,245	€511,019	€266,245	€511,019
South East	€1,132,703	€1,098,722	€0	€1,065,760	€0	€1,065,760	€0	€1,065,760	€0	€1,065,760
South West	€849,524	€824,038	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497
Southern	€1,034,305	€1,003,276	€0	€973,178	€0	€973,178	€0	€973,178	€0	€973,178
Western	€702,677	€681,597	€136,994	€524,155	€136,994	€524,155	€136,994	€524,155	€136,994	€524,155
Total	€9,494,534	€8,967,877	€1,482,371	€7,216,469	€1,151,223	€7,547,617	€1,107,690	€7,591,150	€1,107,690	€7,591,150
Overall Total	€29,498,254	€28,267,801		€27,648,265		€27,648,265		€27,648,265		€27,648,265

Hospital Services

961. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement the Irish Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism's recommendation that an eight-bed national centre for patients suffering and living with IF be established at St. James's Hospital at an annual estimated cost of €3.9 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13867/17]

975. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if, as an interim measure, he will take steps to recommend the immediate establishment of a single dedicated eight-bed national centre for patients living with IF to be located at St. James's Hospital, sufficient to meet the needs of 50% of the national requirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13983/17]

976. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Republic of Ireland is one of the few countries in which its health care system fails to provide a specialist service for IF or HPN patients (details supplied); the steps he will take to remedy this serious situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13984/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 961, 975 and 976 together.

I am aware that a business case for the establishment of a dedicated centre for Intestinal Failure is currently being finalised by St James's Hospital. St James's Hospital is part of the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Any proposals for the funding for the centre for Intestinal failure in St. James's will have to be considered as part of the Hospital Group's overall priorities for services across the Group. The business case will need to be submitted to the HSE for con-

sideration as part of the overall 2018 estimates process and with regard to competing priorities for resources available in 2018.

Hospital Waiting Lists

962. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an operation, having had it cancelled twice already; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13873/17]

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 Waiting Lists

963. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied). [13902/17]

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

964. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when two assessments will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13904/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Funding

965. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason legislation has not been put in place with regard to HIQA (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13908/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Under the Health Act 2007 statutory responsibility is given to the Chief Inspector of Social Services, part of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), for the independent inspection and registration of certain categories of designated centres. The definition of a designated centre as set out in Section 2 of the 2007 Act does not include sheltered housing schemes and there are no plans to extend the remit of HIQA to undertake inspections of sheltered housing.

However the Health Service Executive can provide health and personal services to tenants in sheltered housing in the same way that they are provided to older people living in their own homes in the community. It is my view, and that of the Government, that we need a stand alone funding scheme designed for home care that recognises its particular characteristics together with regulation of home care services. The future regulation of home care services in sheltered accommodation will be considered in this context. With that in mind, I have committed to the initiation of public consultation on the regulation of home care in the coming months.

Services for People with Disabilities

966. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position with regard to a closed respite house in Listowel County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13909/17]

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.

Home Help Service

967. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health when the gratuity payment due to certain home help workers will be made in lieu of pensions payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13915/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy is referring to Home Help work-

ers who are employed by voluntary providers of home help services which are funded under section 39 of the Health Act 2004. I advised the Deputy previously that as these home help workers are not employed by the HSE, the HSE and the Department have no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff including any pension arrangements.

As the Deputy is aware a joint working group was established, as agreed as part of the Lansdowne Road talks, to consider a number of issues in relation to section 39 organisations.

Unfortunately it was not possible to reach an agreement between the parties on the issue of gratuity payments.

Departmental Bodies

968. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national steering group established to develop policy on a major trauma system for Ireland; if any of the proposals include closing emergency departments, diminishing services or closing or removing trauma services from any hospital; if so the identity of those hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13916/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of a policy on a trauma system for Ireland is a joint initiative from the Department of Health and the HSE in recognition that we do not have a coordinated trauma network structure in Ireland. The primary aim of developing this policy is to improve patient outcomes and to lead to a reduction in preventable death and disability for a particular, small category of patients who sustain traumatic injuries. It is not about closing Emergency Departments or diminishing services. There are currently no plans to close or remove trauma services from any hospital. To put this in context, Emergency Departments provide 24/7 access for emergency and urgent presentations across the spectrum of medical and surgical conditions and major trauma patients represent a very small percentage of total Emergency Department activity.

A trauma patient needs access to the best service that has the right resources to match their often multiple and critical needs in the shortest time possible. The trauma care pathway encompasses pre-hospital care, Emergency Department resuscitation, emergency surgical intervention, reconstruction of injuries and rehabilitation. The aim of developing national policy on a trauma system is to ensure that trauma patients are brought to the right place at the right time for the right care so they can make the best recovery possible.

The Steering Group has been working with the Department of Health, the HSE and all relevant HSE National Clinical Leads, including Surgery, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care, Critical Care, Orthopaedics and Trauma on the development of the policy. Given its scale, this is still work in progress but it is expected the Steering Group's report will be completed as soon as possible in 2017.

Services for People with Disabilities

969. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with disabilities in receipt of home support services in each LHO for each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of applications for such a service for children with disabilities received in each LHO in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 [13947/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In the Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2016, the HSE's funded priority was to provide 2.6 million Home Support hours to over 7,300 people with a disability, including children with a disability. The actual number of Home Support hours provided in 2016 was higher, at 2.9 million hours. This reflects the responsive nature of the service and takes account of the fluctuation of assessed need over time, as the needs of individual people change. In 2017, the HSE is committed to the provision of 2.75 million Home Support Hours to people with disabilities, including children with disabilities, which is an increase of 150,000 hours over the target for 2016 of 2.6 million hours.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 970 withdrawn.

Departmental Funding

971. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the status of the business case of the Irish Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism, IrSPEN, with the HSE; when same is likely to be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13957/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

972. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13965/17]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme

973. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will permit two children (details supplied) to attend their choice of general practitioner under the GMS scheme; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no consultation was made with the family in question and that the circumstances of this family are exceptional. [13966/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter,

I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Availability

974. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the benefit of the single market applies throughout all European countries (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13967/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Each EU member state is responsible for the procurement of medicinal products. However, our membership of the single market offers an opportunity for international cooperation with other member countries to reduce the cost of new drugs.

In June 2016, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council adopted conclusions on strengthening the balance in the pharmaceutical systems in the EU and its member states. Those conclusions invited member states to explore opportunities for cooperation on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and to identify areas for cooperation which could contribute to affordability and better access to medicines. I have indicated my support for these measures and I welcome the opportunity for member states to cooperate by sharing information, so that we can achieve affordable and sustainable access to medicines.

I and my officials have been actively engaged with our international colleagues on the issue of drug pricing. I used the opportunity at the second Round Table meeting for European Health Ministers and heads of Europe-based pharmaceutical companies in Portugal last December, and the recent OECD meeting in January, to engage with Ministers from other countries on how to address the challenge of securing access to new medicines for citizens at an affordable price.

Questions Nos. 975 and 976 answered with Question No. 961.

Respite Care Services Provision

977. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the additional funding that was allocated to respite services for persons with disabilities in County Louth in budget 2017, as per commitments made by the Minister of State with special responsibility for Disabilities (details supplied); the location and type of additional respite beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14016/17]

978. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1113 of 16 September 2016, the progress that has been made regarding the provision of emergency respite in County Louth for adults and children with intellectual disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14017/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 977 and 978 together.

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

979. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding allocated to the Mo Shaol initiative in County Louth in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14018/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Service Executive's (HSE's) 2017 National Service Plan contains a priority action to establish an innovative pilot day service aimed at supporting people with severe acquired brain injuries. The HSE has recently written to the representatives of the An Saol project to confirm progression of the pilot in 2017. The project will focus on the provision of therapies for people with severe acquired brain injury.

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

Questions Nos. 980 and 981 answered with Question No. 719.

Hospital Waiting Lists

982. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a CT angiogram at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14025/17]

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.

Housing Policy

983. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if, in a case (details supplied) whereby there is a lien on a home in lieu of medical bills and the person dies but there are

still relatives in the house, it is normal practice by the HSE to insist on the property being sold, thus rendering the relatives homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14026/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

HSE Properties

984. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the disused health centre in Shillelagh, County Wicklow; the avenue for submitting a proposal for its future use as a community facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14027/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

HSE Properties

985. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the public health centre, Millbank, Shillelagh, County Wicklow which has been unused for a number of years; the future proposed for it, in view of the request from community groups to use the building for community services in this isolated rural area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14028/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Medical Card Applications

986. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14030/17]

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.

HSE Expenditure

987. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the exact annual cost of leasing a new premises for the HSE (details supplied). [14031/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

988. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will instruct the HSE to find a residential placement for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14051/17]

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

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

989. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the supports, financial or otherwise, that are in place for a family to take a person (details supplied) home to Ireland from England; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14054/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *A Fair Deal,* 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. The applicant can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. The home must have availability and be able to cater for the applicant's particular needs. In order to apply for the Scheme, an applicant must be ordinarily resident in the State (i.e. living in the State for at least a year or intending to live in the State for at least a year). The Scheme does not cover transportation costs.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;

- Bed and board;

- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living; and

- Laundry service.

A care needs assessment is carried out to identify whether or not an applicant needs long-term nursing home care. If long-term care is indeed required, a financial assessment is then carried out by the HSE to determine how much a participant in the Scheme will contribute to the cost of their care. Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care.

The nursing home loan (Ancillary State Support) is an optional benefit of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, the purpose of which is to ensure that a person does not have to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for long-term nursing home care. Where a person's assets include land and property in the State, the contribution based on such assets (7.5% of the value of such assets per annum) may be deferred. The loan can be repaid at any time but will ultimately fall due for repayment upon the applicant's death.

The Scheme has a number of important safeguards built into the financial assessment which ensures that:

- Nobody will pay more than the actual cost of care;

- An applicant will keep a personal allowance of 20% of his/her income or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater. This is in recognition of the fact that, although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing;

- If an applicant has a spouse/partner remaining at home, he/she will be left with 50% of the couple's income or the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;

- If both members of a couple enter nursing home care, they each retain at least 20% of their income, or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;

- Certain items of expenditure, called allowable deductions, can be taken into account for the financial assessment, including health expenses, payments required by law, rent payments and borrowings in respect of a person's principal private residence;

- A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the Medical Card Scheme or the Drug Payment Scheme, is unaffected by participation in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme or residence in a nursing home.

I note that the Deputy has indicated that the individual in question is dependent on social welfare. The applicant or his family can obtain further information on the supports available through the Scheme, including a list of public, private and voluntary nursing homes in Ireland, from Nursing Homes Support Offices located throughout the country. Contact details are available from the HSE website at *http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/nhss/#offices*.

Departmental Staff Data

990. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of employees across his Department and each agency or organisation under the aegis of his Department

who are suspended from work without prejudice and on full pay pending an investigation; and if he will provide, in the case of there being one employee or more in this situation, details with regards to the suspensions, in tabular form (details supplied). [14063/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no employees in my Department on suspension pending an investigation.

I asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the aspect of the question that relates to their employees. In relation to the Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of my Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Health Products Regulatory Authority

991. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the way the HPRA is funded; the proportion of that funding which is from pharmaceutical companies; the measures taken by his Department to prevent undue influence by the pharmaceutical industry on HPRA decisions on drug policy and appointments to the HPRA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14076/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has confirmed that in 2016, 77% of the Authority's total income was obtained via regulatory fees charged to the pharmaceutical industry. These fees reflect the costs associated with regulatory activities such as the assessment of medicinal products and the inspection of manufacturing and distribution sites. These regulatory activities are critical to ensuring the quality, safety and efficacy of medicinal products on the Irish market. Such fees ensure that the industry (and not the public) covers the majority of the costs related to the regulation of their activities. My Department provided 15% of the HPRA's total income for 2016.

Competent Authorities in other European countries and in other countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia also charge fees to pharmaceutical companies to reflect the costs associated with the regulation of medicines. Similarly, other Irish regulatory authorities also charge fees to the industries that they regulate.

The HPRA fully complies with the Ethics in Public Office Acts, 1995 and 2011. In addition, the Irish Medicines Board Acts 1995 and 2006 have specific provisions in relation to the disclosure of interests by HPRA Board members, employees and members of advisory committees. The HPRA also operates in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The HPRA's Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest Policy reflect the above requirements. All Authority/Committee members, external experts and HPRA staff are required to provide declarations of interests at the time of their initial appointment (and subsequently on an annual basis), not just in relation to their personal interests but also interests related to close family members and any other matters or personal connections which could represent a conflict of interest. Any declared interests are systematically evaluated and appropriate restrictions are put in place to avoid any potential conflicts.

All Authority / Committee members, external experts and HPRA staff must also comply with specific provisions in relation to gifts, hospitality, invitations to speak, fees, external activities and employment as outlined in the HPRA's Conflicts of Interest Policy.

Proposed Legislation

992. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if the HPRA has met representatives of the pharmaceutical industry or other interested parties to discuss the Cannabis for Medicinal Use Regulation Bill 2016; if there are minutes of these meetings; if so, the outcomes of such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14077/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has confirmed that it has not held meetings with pharmaceutical industry or other interested parties to discuss the Cannabis for Medicinal Use Regulation Bill 2016.

In the course of preparing the HPRA Cannabis Scientific Review report requested by me, the HPRA held meetings or teleconferences with some companies that are manufacturing and/or supplying cannabis products, as well as with regulators, clinical and scientific researchers, and patient representatives.

Services for People with Disabilities

993. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the funding for HSE and other voluntary agencies which is provided for residential care for persons with disabilities; the way the level of service is agreed with these agencies; the way these agencies are accountable for keeping to service level agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14078/17]

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 Expenditure

994. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the indirect State funding, through tax deductible medical expenses, including health insurance or other tax breaks, on building or developing health facilities which was made available to private sector health care providers, including a group (details supplied); the information which is collected by his Department on these private sector health care providers' staffing, bed numbers and health outcomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14079/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am informed by the Minister for Finance that capital expenditure incurred on qualifying private hospitals qualifies for capital allowances, in the form of an industrial building annual allowance at the rate of 15% over 6 years and 10% in the seventh year. Capital allowances are granted for such capital expenditure incurred on the construction or refurbishment of a building providing that the building is in use for the purposes of the trade. In this regard capital expenditure must have been incurred during the period 15 May 2002 to 31 December 2009 for private hospitals generally and 28 March 2003 to 31 December 2009 for day-case hospitals. This termination period was extended to 30 June 2010, and further extended to 31 December 2013 in some cases, both extensions limited to certain

specified circumstances.

A qualifying hospital must meet certain conditions in order to qualify for allowances and the following categories of claimants are precluded from getting relief: companies; trustees of a trust; any consultant or other individuals associated with the operation or management of a private hospital, whether employed or self-employed or involved in any other capacity; and property developers or connected persons in certain circumstances. Consultants' rooms and offices are excluded from qualifying and this exclusion applies even where consultants' rooms might be used exclusively for the assessment or treatment of patients.

Expenditure on the construction or refurbishment of qualifying mental health centres also qualifies for capital allowances subject to certain conditions. Qualifying expenditure can be written off at a rate of 15% over 6 years and 10% in the seventh year. The allowances were originally available for qualifying expenditure incurred during the period 23 January 2007 to 31 December 2009. This termination period was extended to 30 June 2010, and further extended to 30 June 2011 in some cases, both extensions limited to certain specified circumstances.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, due to taxpayer confidentiality reasons, they are unable to provide information in relation individual or specific healthcare groups. In addition, information on private healthcare providers is not separately available. I am advised that a Costs of Tax Expenditures Table is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at *http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/costs-expenditures.html*. This table provides an annual breakdown of the cost to the Exchequer for the 'Medical Insurance Premiums' and 'Health Expenses' reliefs from the years 2004 to 2014, the latest year for which data are available. The table will be updated in due course as newer data become available. A second table, available at *http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/property-reliefs.html*, lists information on certain property-based tax incentives including some which relate to hospitals. Finally, my Department does not hold or collate the information requested with regard to private healthcare providers.

Accident and Emergency Departments

995. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the reasons persons with private health insurance are now charged for using emergency departments in public hospitals; the reason for this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14085/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Emergency department (ED) services provided in a public hospital are classified as out-patient services. The current statutory charge for ED attendance is €100 under the Health (Out-Patient Charges) Regulations 2013, which applies to out-patient services provided at any of the following locations: an emergency department; an accident and emergency department; a casualty department; a minor injury unit; an urgent care centre; a local injury unit or any other facility providing similar services. This charge is subject to a number of exemptions under Article 3 of the Regulations including exemptions for medical card holders and those who have a letter of referral from a registered medical practitioner.

Public and private in-patient charges only apply from the day of admittance as an in-patient. Only a hospital doctor who has the right to, can admit a person as an in-patient. ED hospital doctors do not have admitting rights in public hospitals.

Once a person is admitted to hospital, they can opt to be treated as a public or private patient. Since the introduction of the Health (Amendment) Act 2013, all private patients who have waived their eligibility to public health care are now subject to the private in-patient charge. My Department is currently reviewing the operation of the Act on my request.

Hospital Services

996. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the reason the minor injuries unit at Louth County Hospital can only treat persons over the age of 14; his plans to enable the unit to treat persons below age 14; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14087/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Data

997. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of surgical beds located in Louth County Hospital; the number of surgical procedures which have been undertaken in Louth County Hospital in 2016 and to date in 2017; the operating times of the theatre at Louth County Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14088/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Services

998. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if oncology outpatient treatment is available at Louth County Hospital; if not, if he will consider introducing oncology outpatient clinics at the hospital for the administration of cancer medications and other treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14089/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Waiting Lists

999. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for each relevant hospital for MRI scans under the public system. [14090/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

National Maternity Hospital

1000. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if governance issues have been resolved regarding the proposed new national maternity hospital at a site owned by a religious group (details supplied); his views on whether Holles Street hospital may be eliminated as an independent entity if it has no role in governance at the facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14091/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Last November, following mediation discussions, agreement was reached between the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) and St Vincent's Hospital Group (SVHG) on a new governance structure for the co-located hospitals on the St Vincent's campus. The agreement provides for the establishment of a new company - *The*

National Maternity Hospital at Elm Park DAC (limited by shares). The new company will have clinical and operational independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services, as well as financial and budgetary independence. The agreement protects the identity and branding of the NMH and the right to the use of the new maternity hospital facility. I am therefore assured that the long and distinguished identity, ethos and tradition of the NMH will remain.

The development of the new NMH at St Vincent's, which will cater for up to 10,000 births per annum, will constitute the largest single investment ever to be made in maternity services in Ireland. I am delighted to confirm that the project has recently progressed to planning stage.

Hospital Services

1001. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the details of the paediatric and maternity services at Portlaoise Hospital; if they are to be downgraded, the locations these services will move to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14092/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department and the HSE are committed to securing and developing the role of Portlaoise Hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. A report published in December 2016, which HIQA undertook at the request of the Department of Health, shows how much services have improved for the women using maternity services at the hospital. The extent of progress in patient safety measures in Portlaoise maternity services demonstrates the commitment of the staff and the leadership team at Portlaoise Hospital and the team at Hospital Group level.

Reports on Portlaoise Hospital in recent years point to the need for reconfiguration of some services to ensure that patients are treated in the most appropriate setting by specialist staff that can safely meet their needs. The HSE has submitted a draft Action Plan to my Department and it is currently being reviewed in detail.

The most important issue in relation to any changes at Portlaoise Hospital is that patient safety and good quality outcomes must come first. Any changes to services at Portlaoise, once approved, will be undertaken in a planned and orderly manner to further improve services for patients at the hospital and will take account of existing patient flows and demands in other hospitals, as well as the need to develop particular services at Portlaoise in the context of the overall service configuration in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Question No. 1002 answered with Question No. 893.

Vaccination Programme

1003. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the details of the efforts undertaken to date to raise awareness concerning the dangers of meningitis with particular reference to ongoing or planned vaccination programmes and the plans to address any deficiencies in this area in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14101/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The 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, international best practice, and a cost

effective analysis conducted by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics. All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule (PCIS) are provided free of charge.

There are three vaccines in the PCIS protecting children against meningitis.

- Haemophilus Influenzae type B (Hib) was a major cause of meningitis in infants but has now been almost entirely eliminated following the introduction of the Hib vaccine as part of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Programme in 1992.

- Meningococcal C (MenC) vaccine was introduced in October 2000 as part of the routine childhood immunisation and is currently given at 4 and 6 months and a combined Hib/MenC booster at 13 months. Immunity to reduces over time so a booster vaccine for MenC was introduced into the Health Service Executive (HSE) schools immunisation programme in September, 2014 for 12-13 years olds.

- Children born on or after 1 October, 2016 are now receiving the Meningococcal B (Men B) vaccine at 2, 4 and 12 months of age. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make this vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

The HSE are working hard to maximise uptake rates for all vaccines in the PCIS. Uptake rates for Hib are 95% and uptake rates for MenC have increased from 80% in 2010 to close to 90% (89% Q3 2016).

Immunisation policy is based on providing a safe, sustainable and cost-effective programme of immunisation. The introduction of any new meningitis vaccine into the primary childhood immunisation schedule will be considered in the context of recommendations from NIAC, the outcome of cost-effective analysis, and resource availability.

Hospital Services

1004. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the electro encephalogen service has been reduced from a four day to a two day service in Sligo University Hospital since May 2016; his plans to return it to a four day service and to increase it to a five day service, in view of the fact that this hospital is servicing the west Mayo, north west regions and the border counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14106/17]

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.

Departmental Legal Costs

1005. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14134/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department is aware of the need to minimise costs and in general, avails of legal services and advice from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Chief State Solicitor. My Department has a Legal Unit, staffed by qualified legal professionals who provide advice on a wide range of international legal is-

sues. Having such "in-house" legal experts reduces the costs which would be incurred if the Department was to engage externally for similar services. However, occasionally specialised legal services are required.

The figures requested by the Deputy are not immediately available and I will revert to the Deputy once the Department has collated the required figures.

Professional Qualifications

1006. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when an application with the NMBI will be finalised for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14155/17]

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 to register in the General Division of the Register with NMBI on 7 February 2017. The NMBI confirmed that they are awaiting receipt of the verification document from the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the UK. It should be noted that the NMBI usually receives batches of verification documents from the NMC every 10 working days. The NMBI have further advised that the applicant's file will be assessed as a matter of priority and the applicant will be contacted thereafter to advise her of the outcome of the assessment.

Home Help Service

1007. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists for home help in counties Laois and Kildare; and the length of time they are on those lists. [14157/17]

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.

Ambulance Service

1008. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if there is any policy or procedural item which prevents a first response responder paramedic working with the ambulance service in Northern Ireland from providing treatment, such as sutures to wounds and injuries, to persons when dispatched to attend to calls here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14198/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

1009. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the costs of the fair deal scheme in 2017 or 2018; if the scheme can be expanded to include care being provided in the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14199/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for people who require long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. At the moment there are no plans to reduce the budget of the NHSS.

It is the Government's view that we need a standalone funding scheme designed for home care that recognises its particular characteristics together with regulation of home care services. However, a significant amount of detailed preparation needs to be done before final decisions are taken on the form of a home care scheme and the regulation of these services. This is a priority for me and I have committed to the initiation of a public consultation on the future funding and regulation of home care in the coming months.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1010. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if methane emissions can be reduced or capped without harming the agricultural sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14141/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is a whole of Government approach to climate policy as set out in the National Climate Policy Position. Officials from my Department work very closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, which is the lead department in this area. Policy in the agricultural sector is formed around "an approach to carbon neutrality" which addresses both sequestration and emissions mitigation. Methane accounts for approximately 22% of Ireland's GHG emissions.

Current research into reducing methane emissions is primarily focussed on reducing emissions per unit product (ie. reducing emissions intensity). This research is primarily focused on improving productivity per animal and thus decoupling animal numbers from production. Most of this research is focussed on developing economic breeding indices (EBI), extension of the grazing season, reducing beef finishing times (and reducing total methane per animal) and optimising beef and dairy animals via the use of sexed semen. Many of these measures are currently in use or being commenced.

Carbon audits by our Food Agency (An Bord Bia) are placing new emphasis on reduction in emissions intensity of beef and dairy produce.

Through the deployment of innovative and efficient practices at farm level, combined with the application of emerging scientific knowledge, Ireland can take the necessary steps towards addressing the challenge of greenhouse gas emissions, including methane, in the Irish agriculture sector. In the Rural Development Programme, there are some 38,000 farmers taking part in the Green Low carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) and 24,000 herds are in the Beef Data Genomics Programme, which is a world-leading initiative to improve the quality of breeding of our beef cattle.

Under the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, a National Mitigation Plan is being prepared. This work is overseen by Government through a hierarchy of committees and sub-groups, with independent advice from the Climate Change Advisory Council. These committees and groups include the Cabinet Committee and Senior Officials' Group on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action, a Technical Research and Modelling Group and a Domestic Climate Finance Group.

Food Wise 2025 – the strategic plan for the sustainable development of agri-food sector over the next decade - provides a framework for the agri sector to engage with the National Mitigation Plan. Food Wise builds on its predecessor and focuses on the continued growth in the value of Irish agri-food including dairy production. While this is likely to mean some increase in dairy numbers, it is not expected that there will be a significant increase in overall cattle numbers.

There is a strong commitment in Food Wise 2025 to measure and monitor the sustainability credentials of the sector. As part of the implementation of Food Wise, an Environmental Sustainability Committee has been established. This implementation process will include evaluation and assessment of the delivery of sustainability and mitigation actions.

My Department continues to invest in and engage with research initiatives to further assist with the refinement, development and deployment of new and innovative practices to reduce Green House Gases that are associated with agricultural production.

Climate Change Policy

1011. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Ireland will be represented at the global symposium on soil organic carbon being held in Rome under the auspices of the FAO (details supplied). [14264/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department recognises the importance of soil carbon and its contribution to the global challenge set by the Paris agreement to limit warming to 2 degrees above pre industrial levels and to pursue limiting warming to less than 1.5 degrees. Irish research will be well represented at the FAO Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon considering the global scope of the meeting.

Dr. Rogier Schulte, Wageningen University (formerly Teagasc) will give an oral presentation: "Carbon sequestration in Irish grasslands", based on research funded by my Department, Teagasc and the Dairy research trust.

Dr. Ibrahim Khalil, UCD, will give also an oral presentation: "Coupling high spatial resolution data, Geographical Information System approaches and modelling for reliable estimates of Soil Organic Carbon stocks and their historical changes in agricultural lands". This research was funded by the EPA.

The plenary sessions of the symposium will be available on webcast, and my policy officers intend to follow these.

Scientific research has a central role to play in developing our understanding of the carbon sequestration potential of our natural land resources. To this end, my Department recognises the important role this Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon can be in improving our understanding of the role the land use sector plays in mitigating greenhouse gases and ensuring the environmental integrity of the access to LULUCF credits provided in the EU proposals of last July.

Installation Aid Scheme Applications

1012. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) who applied for installation aid in 2003 did not receive it; if their application will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12835/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The closing date for the Installation Aid Scheme was the 31 December 2006.

According to the records available the person concerned submitted an initial application on 22 May 2002. An application for payment was due to be submitted by 26 October 2004, however, no application was received. All original documents relating to the application were returned to the applicant on 15 June 2009.

GLAS Payments

1013. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the GLAS scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12838/17]

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

1014. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the GLAS scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12839/17]

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.

Forestry Grants

1015. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the case of a person (details supplied) who is requesting compensation for forestry that was burnt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12856/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not provide grant-aid to re-establish forests damaged by fire, and encourages forest

owners to ensure that there is appropriate insurance cover in place.

In relation to the suspension of the person's forest premiums, the requirement to replant damaged areas is a condition of the Afforestation Scheme under which forestry is grant-aided. In applying for grant aid, applicants agree to maintain the forestry plantation to the standards required and to carry out appropriate instructions in relation to the management and upkeep of the plantation. Payments on this forestry contract have been suspended pending completion of the remedial works and receipt of a Declaration of Completion.

As investigations of damage to property by fire and any prosecutions arising from such damage are matters for An Garda Síochána, it is inappropriate for me to respond to that reference in the details supplied.

Single Payment Scheme Expenditure

1016. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12863/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Applications in respect of the 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes and 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes were received, outside the timeframes allowed, from the person named together with supporting documentation for review. As a result of that review the late penalties were waived. Payment has issued in respect of the 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes to the nominated bank account of the person named.

In relation to the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), a review of the entitlements position in this case was required and is nearing completion. Payment under BPS and also under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue in the near future.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

1017. **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. [12898/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payment in respect of the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Maritime Jurisdiction

1018. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for and the consultation process behind the decision to legislate to allow Northern Ireland registered vessels access to fishing within the six mile limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12921/17]

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.

While the Bill proposes to restore access to Northern Ireland boats to fish, under the terms of the Voisinage arrangements, this access is subject to the same conditions that apply to Irish sea-fishing boats. The Bill itself does not apply the specific conditions. Therefore, other parallel associated measures will be required to ensure that conditions in place for Irish sea-fishing boats are appropriately applied to Northern Ireland boats fishing under the Voisinage arrangements. The process of identifying which conditions may need to be legislated for is under way. The conditions will include such restrictions as currently apply to Irish sea-fishing boats. When the necessary measures have been identified, the most appropriate mechanisms for applying them to Northern Ireland boats will be determined. The objective will be for these measures to come into effect at the same time as commencement order for the Bill. Together, the Bill and the associated measures will re-establish the status quo for fishing access that existed under the Voisinage arrangements before the Supreme Court's judgment on 27 October. The only difference will be that the Voisinage arrangements will be provided for within a legislative framework. The access arrangements for Northern Ireland boats will not change as a result of this Bill, Northern Ireland boats will simply regain fishing access they have had for decades under the Voisinage arrangements in the zero to six nautical mile zone of the territorial waters of the State. They will also continue to be subject to the same measures that apply to Irish-registered fishing boats.

Fishing industry representatives have been briefed on the Bill and the associated measures at recent meetings with my Department. 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 2016 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.

Installation Aid Scheme Applications

1019. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons under 40 years of age with a green certificate that started farming between 2000 and 2008 and did not draw installation; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [12929/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Installation Aid Scheme was provided for under the 2000-2006 National Development Plan and the Young Farmers' Installation Scheme was introduced under the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme.

The Installation Aid Scheme provided a grant to farmers under 35 setting up in farming for the first time on or before 31 December 2006 provided they met the income and educational requirements of the Scheme. Approximately 5,700 applications were received by the Department under the Scheme and 4,456 young farmers received grants.

The Young Farmers' Installation Scheme was introduced in June 2007 and closed in October 2008. It provided a grant to young farmers under 35 setting-up for the first time in farming on or after 1 January 2007. 941 applications were received and 862 applicants received grants under the Scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

1020. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons under 40 years of age with a green certificate that started farming between 2000 and 2008 that received payments under the BPS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12930/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not hold records of farmers under the age of forty who hold green certificates except where that information has been submitted by individual farmers as a requirement under an application for a particular scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

1021. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average payment to farmers under 40 years of age with a green certificate that started farming between 2000 and 2008 under the BPS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12931/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not hold records of farmers under the age of forty who hold green certificates except where that information has been submitted by individual farmers as a requirement under an application for a particular scheme.

Animal Welfare

1022. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if consideration will be given to introducing legislation to provide for a licence for those selling pets irrespective of the number of pets sold which would include a requirement for licensed sellers of pets to display their licence number when advertising, regardless of the means used to advertise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12942/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides that regulations can be made in respect of the registration of animals and premises where animals are kept, sold, processed, moved or otherwise dealt with. This matter is currently under active consideration by my Department in relation to pets sold in the retail environment.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

1023. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of each of the sub sectors of agriculture to which the Common Agriculture Policy 2014 - 2020 is allocated; the associated amounts allocated to each sub sector; the amount of matching funding made available in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12944/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Funding under the CAP is comprised of 100% EU funded Pillar 1 – Basic Payment / Greening / Young Farmers Schemes, and Pillar 2, which are co-funded RDP Schemes. Pillar 1 schemes are not sector specific, being based on the farmers historic entitlements, rather than their current type of farming activity.

As regards Pillar 2, Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 is co-funded by the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the national exchequer. EU support for the RDP via the EAFRD amounts to an aggregate sum of €2.19 billion over the 7-year Programme lifespan. This EU funding will be supplemented by exchequer funding bringing the total allocation to some €4 billion.

Generally RDP schemes are not sector specific. However the Beef Data and Genomics Programme and Animal Welfare Scheme for Sheep are sector specific. Their total (EU and national) allocations for 2015, 2016 and 2017 are set out below. The EU co funding rate for the BDGP is 53% and that co funding rate also applies to half the funding for the Animal Welfare Scheme for Sheep.

Title of co funded Scheme	2015 allocation€000	2016 allocation€000	2017 allocation€000
Beef Data and Genomics Programme	*35,000	52,000	52,000
Animal Welfare Scheme for Sheep	0	0	25,000

*Revised allocation post 2015 Supplementary Estimates Process

The individual scheme allocations for 2018, 2019, and 2020 have not been determined yet as annual scheme allocations will be determined within the context of the estimates process for those years.

The Knowledge Transfer Scheme and TAMS also have sector specific sub–schemes but the sub-allocations are indicative rather than definitive in so far as they are operated within the same sub-head of the DAFM vote.

Question No. 1024 withdrawn.

Exceptional Needs Payments

1025. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the other subsectors within farming that have received allocations from the European Commission for each of the years 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019; the sub sectors in which co-financing is also available with regard to the European Commission's announcement in July 2016 that it would support Irish farmers affected by the livestock crisis with €11.1 million and relaxed state aid rules in order that the national exchequer could co-finance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12946/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I assume the Deputy is referring to exceptional aid from the EU Commission.

In 2014, the EU Commission allocated €13.2 million to Ireland under a package to assist farmers in the pig and dairy sectors. With the addition of national funds, funding was increased to €27.4 million, €1m of which was allocated to the pig sector, and the balance of which was provided to the dairy sector. The EU monies were to be paid by 30 June 2015.

As part of a second €350 million package agreed at EU level in 2016, Ireland was allocated €11.1 million. Using National funds, I increased this provision to €25 million, and used this, in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), to provide a low cost loan fund of €150 million, available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. While the EU funding provided may be used only for livestock sectors, the loan fund, using agriculture de minimis state aid rules, is available to the grain and horticulture sectors.

A further €150 million was made available to Member States in 2016 to provide funding for dairy farmers wishing to reduce production. Irish dairy farmers will receive approximately €6.5 million from this fund by the end of March 2017.

Brexit Issues

1026. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the figures highlighted in a presentation by an organisation (details supplied) with respect to Ireland's percentage area of EU waters and the percentage of fish caught and landed in Irish waters pre and post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12965/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It is important to note that borders and maritime delineations are in the first instance a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. However, I can provide you with our working figures for the purposes of preparing our analyses of the potential implications of Brexit for the Irish fishing industry.

Our figures show that the total EU Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (200 miles) is 7,044,000 square kilometres. The Irish EEZ is 438,000 square kilometres, this amounts to 6.22% of the EU EEZ. The UK EEZ is 747,000 square kilometres, which is 10.6% of the EU EEZ. Once the UK leaves the EU, the total EU EEZ will be reduced to 6,297,000 square kilometres. The Irish share will then be 6.96% of the total EU EEZ.

EU landings from the Irish Zone account for 13% of the total EU landings from EU waters by volume and 13% by value. (excludes Med, Black Sea, Madeira and Azores). It is not possible to quantify exactly what the percentages would be post Brexit as this would depend upon

a number of factors but indicative figures would be 18.9% and 16.5% respectively.

With regard to the figures provided by the organisation that the Deputy refers to, I can offer no comment as I have no knowledge as to how those figures were calculated. The figures I have quoted above and upon which we are basing our analyses were provided by the Marine Institute.

GLAS Data

1027. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 that have received 85% of their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the total number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12980/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the table.

	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 2	GLAS 2	GLAS 2	GLAS 2
County	Number of	Number sent	Number	Number of	Number of	Number	Number	Number of
	Applicants	For Payment	with PPV	Unpaid	Applicants	sent for	with PPV	Unpaid
			Pass	Cases		Payment	Pass	Cases
Carlow	279	245	0	34	128	115	0	13
Cavan	913	813	0	100	432	403	0	29
Clare	1,621	1,453	0	168	691	646	0	45
Cork	2,170	1,833	0	337	1,014	894	0	120
Donegal	1,955	1,661	0	294	1,012	859	0	153
Dublin	63	50	0	13	17	14	0	3
Galway	3,104	2,581	0	523	1,313	1,099	0	214
Kerry	1,780	1,554	0	226	877	768	0	109
Kildare	251	213	0	38	82	69	0	13
Kilkenny	434	374	0	60	212	183	0	29
Laois	372	315	0	57	197	179	0	18
Leitrim	1,026	912	0	114	420	383	0	37
Limerick	1,056	913	0	143	302	275	0	27
Longford	517	466	0	51	349	328	0	21
Louth	149	120	0	29	80	73	0	7
Mayo	2,569	2,163	0	406	1,333	1,100	0	233
Meath	428	363	0	65	204	175	0	29
Monaghan	579	517	0	62	146	131	0	15
Offaly	477	421	0	56	280	248	0	32
Roscommon	1,535	1,361	0	174	554	507	0	47
Sligo	949	858	0	91	369	340	0	29
Tipperary	1,145	972	0	173	514	437	0	77
Waterford	364	289	0	75	132	106	0	26
Westmeath	654	586	0	68	264	243	0	21

	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	GLAS 2	GLAS 2	GLAS 2	GLAS 2
County	Number of	Number sent	Number	Number of	Number of	Number	Number	Number of
	Appli-cants	For Pay-ment	with PPV	Unpaid	Appli-cants	sent for	with PPV	Unpaid
			Pass	Cases		Payment	Pass	Cases
Wexford	776	636	0	140	270	236	0	34
Wicklow	332	278	0	54	155	126	0	29
Totals	25,498	21,947	0	3,551	11,347	9,937	0	1,410

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

1028. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that applied for AEOS that have received their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the total number of AEOS recipients that have yet to receive payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12981/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS) a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

As all AEOS II participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This is the same procedure as applied to AEOS 1 participants finishing in that Scheme.

All cases are cleared for payment as outstanding issues are resolved and payment of these cases is made on a weekly basis.

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Carlow	49	41	8
Cavan	244	198	46
Clare	556	469	87
Cork	428	337	91
Donegal	1360	1133	227
Dublin	9	9	0
Galway	1245	1026	219
Kerry	568	467	101
Kildare	39	29	10
Kilkenny	109	80	29
Laois	80	55	25
Leitrim	430	366	64
Limerick	224	172	52
Longford	89	70	19
Louth	41	30	11
Mayo	1399	1155	244
Meath	83	68	15

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Monaghan	151	108	43
Offaly	110	86	24
Roscommon	478	401	77
Sligo	335	285	50
Tipperary	245	173	72
Waterford	82	69	13
Westmeath	122	89	33
Wexford	84	51	33
Wicklow	80	63	17
Totals	8640	7030	1610

Greyhound Industry

1029. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture; Food and the Marine if the Irish Greyhound Stud Book is the property of the State; the annual revenue it generated from 2000 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12994/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Section 26(2) of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, states that the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) is the controlling authority for the breeding and coursing of greyhounds. The 'Irish Greyhound Studbook' is maintained by the Irish Coursing Club.

The matter referred to by the Deputy is an operational matter for the ICC.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

1030. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the organisation responsible for the nomination of each of the current members appointed to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB); the date on which they were nominated; the panel in which that organisation is included according to both section 23 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997 and associated regulations; the date on which they were last appointed or reappointed by him to ALAB; if he will identify any panel in respect of which there is an outstanding appointment to ALAB; the date on which he requested nominations from each of the organisations in that panel; the associated organisations in that panel that have submitted nominations in respect of that panel and the date on which those nominations were received by him; if a decision has been made not to appoint those parties nominated; the reason no appointment has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13060/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to board members of the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) is set out in the table.

Name	Nominating Organisation	Date of Nomination	Class of Organisations prescribed under section 23 (3) is each board member a representative of	Date of Appointment
Mr Sean Murphy	IFA Aquaculture	16-11-2012	23(3)(a) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are concerned with the promotion of the development of aquaculture or are representative of persons carrying on the business of developing aquaculture;	01-01-2013
Vacant (Lorcán Ó Cinnéide resigned on 1-3-2016)			23(3)(b) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are concerned with the conservation, development and protection of wild fisheries	
Mr Brendan Brice	Engineers Ireland	2-9-2015	23(3)(c) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are representative of persons whose professions or occupations relate to physical planning and development	17-6-2016

Name	Nominating Organisation	Date of Nomination	Class of Organisations prescribed under section 23 (3) is each board member a representative of	Date of Appointment
Prof. Owen McIntyre	The Minister reappointed Prof. Owen McIntyre in accordance with Section 24 (1) (b) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1997. Originally appointed following nomination by an Taisce in 2013	24-1-2013	23(3)(d) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are representative of persons concerned with the protection and preservation of the environment and amenities	17-6-2016
Mr Jim Power	Irish Business and Employers Confederation Limited	5 -4-2016	23(3)(e) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are concerned with the promotion of general economic development	17-6-2016
Mr Michael Sweeney	Muintir na Tire	10-5-2012	23(3)(f) organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are concerned with the promotion of community development	01-01-2013

Board Vacancy

At present, there is one vacancy on the board of ALAB which is in the category covered by section 23 (3) (b) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997. Section 23 (3) (b) sets out organisations which, in the Minister's opinion, are concerned with the conservation, development and protection of wild fisheries. The vacancy arose due to a resignation of the Federation of Irish Fishermen representative. Statutory Instrument 621/2011 which sets out the prescribed bodies that may make nominations to the Minister in accordance with section 23 (3) (b) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997 specifies the following organisations: Angling Council of Ireland, Federation of Irish Fishermen and the Irish Fishermen's Organisation Ltd. I do not consider that this grouping of organisations adequately represent organisations which in my opinion are concerned with the conservation, development and protection of wild fisheries in so far as the Federation of Irish Fishermen is no longer active and the Irish Fishermen's Organisation Ltd is no longer an organisations that represents the fishing industry at national level. I plan to

review, consult and amend Statutory Instrument 621/2011 to ensure that the bodies prescribed are representative of national organisations that are concerned with the conservation, development and protection of wild fisheries. As soon as the Statutory Instrument is amended, I will seek nominations from the relevant prescribed bodies with a view to an appointment being made at the earliest opportunity.

Agriculture Schemes

1031. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will increase the level of funding available for the cashflow support loan for farmers following reporting from banks due in mid March, in view of the level of applications already submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13114/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The "Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme" was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), making €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. 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. This Scheme is significant in this regard, providing farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, which will allow them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

SBCI uses the €25 million of public funding provided by my Department to leverage the total amount of €150 million and, 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 Scheme is administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank and they will report on progress to the SBCI on a regular basis, although no official returns have been made as yet. However all of the banks have confirmed that they have applications up to the amounts available under the Scheme. There may be some residual availability but this will only emerge as applications are processed and loans drawn down.

My Department's contribution of €25million includes €11 million from the EU's 'exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers'. It was this exceptional aid package which facilitated the Scheme from an EU State Aid perspective, and additional funding is not possible under this particular arrangement. Other sectors, such as tillage and horticulture, were facilitated by national funding under the 'de minimis' State Aid rules.

I am very pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I hope that the commercial banks will respond positively to this demand by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future. I plan to meet with the Chief Executives of the banks shortly to discuss this and other issues relating access to finance in the agri-food sector.

GLAS Data

1032. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in counties Cavan and Monaghan that have received GLAS payments since the start of 2017, in tabular form; if they received GLAS 1 or GLAS 2 payments; the number of persons in both counties that were deemed ineligible; the number of persons that remain to be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13137/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested on Cavan and Monaghan GLAS payments is set out in the table. To date no GLAS 1 or GLAS 2 application in Co. Monaghan has been rejected while for County Cavan no GLAS 1 application has been rejected but two GLAS 2 applications have been rejected.

Cavan and Monaghan GLAS payments:

	GLAS 1	GLAS 1	Of which	GLAS 1	GLAS 2	GLAS 2	Of which	GLAS 2
County	Number of	Number sent	sent for	Number of	Number of	Number	sent for	Number of
	Applicants	For Payment	payment	Unpaid	Applicants	sent for	payment	Unpaid
			2017	Cases		Payment	2017	Cases
Cavan	913	813	110	100	432	403	72	29
Monaghan	579	517	79	62	146	131	17	15

Coillte Teoranta

1033. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of all Coillte owned sites in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the previous occasion investment took place at these sites; the amount of investment in these sites since 2010, in tabular form; his plans to invest in these sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13140/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte CGA was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management and development of their lands, are the responsibility of the company.

Coillte advise that the company owns 225 properties with over c. 10,000 hectares in the Cavan / Monaghan area. I understand there is both ongoing investment in relation to the management of these properties and also specific investment in relation to the development of forest recreational facilities, with all such investment being operational matters for the company.

Coillte has, however, advised that there has been almost €1.7 million spent between 2010 and 2017 on recreational development and maintenance works in Coillte owned sites in Monaghan and Cavan. The company advised that almost €0.8 million has been spent by their Forestry Division on general maintenance and specific developments and add that a further €0.9 million was invested by Cavan County Council in the Burren project specifically in developing an interpretative centre and associated works including car park and trails.

Coillte advise that the areas that accounted for the majority of the expenditure include:

- The Burren, as outlined above, which relates to the development of an interpretative centre and associated works including car park and trails;

- Killykeen Forest Park which relates to the installation of a new multi-access trail, new cycling trails and signage;

- Dún a Rí Forest Park which relates to trail upgrading, car-park repair and new signage, and

- Rossmore Forest Park which relates to general maintenance across the various facilities.

Coillte also advised that some €250,000 was invested in their telecoms business in the region prior to the sale of that business in 2015.

As regards ongoing investment, Coillte advise that the company has carried out improvements on the 225 forestry properties in the Cavan-Monaghan area since 2010, in relation to which Coillte will send the details directly to the Deputy, when the data is compiled.

GLAS Applications

1034. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will investigate a GLAS issue (details supplied) and make the required changes to the mistakenly inaccurate GLAS application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13192/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A GLAS 3 application on behalf of the person named was submitted on the dedicated online application system. The person named was approved into the scheme for all actions included in his application with a commencement date of 1 January 2017.

It is not possible at this stage to change actions and this was clearly advised at the time of submission of the application.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1035. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an AEOS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13195/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS contract in 2010. The full payments due have been issued for the 2010 - 2014 scheme years. A first instalment of payments due for the final scheme year of 2015 was paid on 05 September 2016. Issues arose in relation to penalties to the balancing payment for 2016. This matter has now been resolved and the final amount due, less any penalty to be deducted, will be paid shortly.

GLAS Payments

1036. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13199/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% advance payment for 2016 has been paid to the person named. The balancing 15% payment for 2016 will be processed in due course according to the regulatory requirements.

Direct Payment Scheme

1037. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address matters (details supplied) with regard to the European Commission's figures on direct payments for 2015. [13202/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The report on Indicative figures referred to by the Deputy relates to the 2015 European Financial Year which covered the last year of the Single Payment Scheme (2014). The 2014 Scheme year was governed by the previous regulations which did not provide for a cap on payments and on that basis 64 applicants were in receipt of payments greater than €150,000.

The maximum amount payable to any one applicant since 16 October 2015 under the Basic Payment Scheme (excluding the Greening Payment) is capped at €150,000 per annum and applies from the first year of the scheme in 2015. Ireland actively supported the concept of this maximum level during the CAP negotiations. Under the new Direct Payments Regulations, it was open to Member States to reduce payments over €150,000 by between 5% and 100%. Ireland chose the highest possible reduction, thus effectively capping BPS payments at €150,000.

By opting for this approach, the direct payments system is made fairer and more equitable while at the same time ensuring that the level of redistribution of payments between farmers is not of a scale that could jeopardise the achievement of the Food Wise 2025 objectives.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1038. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of persons in county Tipperary that have not received 85% of the total 2016 payment for GLAS 1, GLAS 2 and AEOS; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13220/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Some 1,145 farmers in Tipperary are active in GLAS 1 of which 972 have been sent for 2016 payment with 174 remaining to be paid. For GLAS 2 514 are active in the scheme of which 437 have been sent for payment with 77 remaining to be paid.

For AEOS, 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 before payments can issue. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for AEOS 2 participants, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. These checks are on-going and payments are issued on a weekly basis as cases are cleared. 173 of 245 active scheme participants have been sent for payment with 72 remaining to be paid.

Animal Welfare Bodies

1039. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Government will increase its funding to an organisation (details supplied) to assist the organisation in tackling animal cruelty and allow it to employ inspectors to monitor animal welfare across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13245/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has provided funding to organisations involved in protecting animal welfare since 1995 in order to enable these organisations provide a valuable service in the area of animal welfare. Applications for funding from animal welfare organisations are assessed by my Department and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals and the level of funding raised by organisations from other sources to support welfare activities.

In December 2016 funding of €2,480,500 was provided to 137 animal welfare organisations throughout the country. The organisation in question was awarded funding of €290,000 and its affiliate organisations were awarded funding of €387,000 bringing total funding to €677,000. I am satisfied that this represents a reasonable and substantial level of support having regard to the current budgetary constraints together with the funding provided to the other animal welfare bodies throughout the country. My Department officials also provide considerable administrative support to the organisation in question to assist its Inspectors in carrying out their work in protecting animal welfare.

Funding allocations for 2017 will be considered in light of the overall availability of funding and the level of applications from other welfare organisations.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme

1040. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding negotiations with the EU Commission on specific measures (details supplied); and when he expects these schemes to be rolled out. [13258/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Locally Led Agri-Environment schemes under Ireland's Rural Development Programme include the Burren Programme, the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Locally Led Hen Harrier and Fresh Water Pearl Mussel projects and the EIP Locally Led Environmental and Climate Projects.

The Burren Programme was introduced as part of the 1st amendment to the RDP which was approved by the European Commission on 23 June 2016. It is now in its second year of operation.

The EIP Locally Led schemes were introduced as part of the 2nd amendment to the RDP which was approved by the European Commission on 25 January 2017. My Department has already moved to implement all these schemes, seeking and assessing tenders for the Project Teams to lead the Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel schemes, and opening the first call for locally-led EIP projects which saw 118 proposals submitted by the closing date.

Agriculture Schemes

1041. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) will qualify for a top up from the national reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13261/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named did not receive an allocation of entitlements under the 2015 Scottish Derogation measure. He did receive an allocation of entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve in 2007. An allocation of entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve does not preclude an applicant from benefiting from the Basic Payment Scheme National Reserve.

I was glad to announce recently that funding of just over €5 million has been made available to fund a National Reserve in 2017.

In line with the EU Regulations governing the National Reserve, the two mandatory categories of 'young farmer' and 'new entrant to farming' will receive priority access to the Reserve.

A young farmer is defined as a farmer aged no more than 40 years of age in the year when they first submit an application under the Basic Payment Scheme and who commenced their farming activity no more than five years prior to submitting that application. A new entrant to farming is defined as a farmer who commenced their agricultural activity during the previous two years and did not have any agricultural activity in their own name and at their own risk in the five years preceding the start of the present agricultural activity. These definitions apply to all Member States and my Department has no discretion with regard to their implementation in Ireland. Successful applicants will also be required to meet certain criteria with regard to agricultural educational qualifications and off-farm income. Full details in relation to the application process for the National Reserve 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 will be 15th May 2017.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

1042. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13273/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of my Department currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Agriculture Schemes

1043. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if due to the demand for the low cost loan scheme which resulted in all moneys being allocated within four weeks, he will make more funding available to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13388/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The "Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme" was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), making €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. 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. This Scheme is significant in this regard, providing farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, which will allow them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

SBCI uses the €25 million of public funding provided by my Department to leverage the total amount of €150 million and, 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 Scheme is administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank and they will report on progress to the SBCI on a regular basis, although no official returns have been made as yet. However all of the banks have confirmed that they have applications up to the amounts available under the Scheme. There may be some residual availability but this will only emerge as applications are processed and loans drawn down.

My Department's contribution of €25million includes €11 million from the EU's 'exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers'. It was this exceptional aid package which facilitated the Scheme from an EU State Aid perspective, and additional funding is not possible under this particular arrangement. Other sectors, such as tillage and horticulture, were facilitated by national funding under the 'de minimis' State Aid rules.

I am very pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I hope that the commercial banks will respond positively to this demand by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future. I plan to meet with the Chief Executives of the banks shortly to discuss this and other issues relating to access to finance in the agri-food sector.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1044. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their outstanding 2016 AEOS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13394/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payments have 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly and payments due will issue then.

Rural Development Programme

1045. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address calls from an organisation (details supplied) and its 6,000 membership for representation on the EU monitoring committee for the rural development programme in order that the needs of small family farms are heard and met through the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13414/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The request by the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association for membership of the Monitoring Committee for Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020 is currently under consideration.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1046. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their AEOS 2 payment. [13420/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payments have 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly and payments due will issue then.

Veterinary Inspection Service

1047. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if persons that have given long service as temporary veterinary inspectors with his Department will have public service pension entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13450/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Temporary Veterinary Inspectors are engaged as and when required by my Department to assist my

Department's permanent veterinary staff. They are not employees of my Department, rather they are engaged on a contract for services, and therefore they have no pension entitlements with my department.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

1048. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 703 of 19 July 2016, the status of a TAMS application by a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that it has been some time since they applied for this grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13464/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is an applicant under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme in TAMS11.

There were a number of issues identified with the original application, all of which have now been satisfactorily addressed. The file was subsequently processed, based on the information provided by the applicant and approval issued for the investment works proposed on 9 March 2017.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1049. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive the final year AEOS 2 payment. [13506/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payments have 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed

shortly and payments due will issue then.

GLAS Payments

1050. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on a review of a GLAS 2 application submitted by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; when a decision will issue in relation to this review; the reason for the delay in issuing a decision on this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13509/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A full technical and administrative review of this case is nearing completion and my officials will contact the person named in relation to the matter in the near future.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

1051. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which Coillte has fully complied with all of its own consultancy processes and procedures in respect of development of Coillte land at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13519/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte CGA was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management and development of their forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

The company has, however, provided details of its involvement in the development, to which the Deputy refers, at Hellfire Club/Massey's Wood in South Dublin County Council. Coillte advises that it has entered into an agreement with South Dublin County Council to allow the Council to develop proposals for a gateway visitor facility in the Dublin Mountains located at the Hellfire forest property. The company advises that this facility is intended to introduce the Dublin Mountains to a range of new visitors and improve facilities for visitors seeking to access the forest and other properties in the Dublin Mountains area. The company also advises that the proposal is to develop a series of improved walking and hiking trails in Hellfire and Massey's Wood forest properties to link into the Dublin Mountains Way (one of the National Waymarked Ways) and provide for greater accessibility to the forests catering for the abilities of a wider range of visitors, and will include a visitor building with a café, interactive information for visitors about the natural and built heritage of the area, and toilets and rest areas. I am also advised that a tree-top connection will link Hellfire and Massey's Wood – similar to the canopy walk trail in Lough Key Forest Park. I understand that improved car-parking and traffic management facilities are also proposed to deal with significant increased use of the forest properties in the Dublin Mountains area.

As regards consultation, Coillte advise that the proposal (if advanced to planning stage), will follow all statutory consultation procedures under the Planning and Development Acts. Coillte add that they have already undertaken early local engagement with local residents and adjoining landowners on a one-to-one basis and with two group presentations to adjoining landowners, the next one of which is scheduled for tomorrow (March 22nd). Coillte advise that it has a stated consultation policy and procedures published on http://www.coillte.ie/about-us/social-responsibility/consultation/, that they are following stated processes and that this process of engagement and consultation is ongoing. Coillte concluded by advising that, where sugges-

tions and issues of concern have been raised by stakeholders, Coillte have endeavoured to make amendments to proposals to deal with such concerns, citing the example here of the scale of the proposed visitor building, which was flagged as a concern by adjoining landowners. Coillte advise that the scale has been reduced to address the concerns raised locally.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

1052. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Coillte has a full and accurate list of all farmers and other landowners who are likely to be materially affected by a proposed development on Coillte land at a location (details supplied); the steps he plans to take to ensure all relevant consultation processes and procedures are fully followed by Coillte in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13520/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte CGA was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management and development of their forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

The company has, however, provided the information sought in relation to its involvement in the development at Hellfire Club/Massey's Wood in South Dublin County Council. Coillte advise that it has been provided with a full list of all adjoining landowners whether they are households or farm owners (from Property Registration Authority records), adjoining all boundaries of Hellfire and Massey's forest properties.

Consultation in relation to the proposed development is an operational matter for Coillte. The company has, however, advised that it has a stated consultation policy and procedures (published on www.coillte.ie/about-us/social-responsibility/consultation/), that it is following stated processes and that this process of engagement and consultation is ongoing. Coillte advise that the proposal (if advanced to planning stage), will follow all statutory consultation procedures under the Planning and Development Acts, but add that they have already undertaken early local engagement with local residents and adjoining landowners on a one-to-one basis and with 2 group presentations to adjoining landowners, (with the next one scheduled for tomorrow, March 22nd). Coillte also advise that, where suggestions and issues of concern have been raised by stakeholders, Coillte have endeavoured to make amends to proposals to deal with such concerns. Coillte are maintaining a record of all consultations in compliance with its stated policy and procedures.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

1053. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are proposals to be considered under the CAP negotiations which would suggest that persons on pensions should not receive farm payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13536/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Negotiations on the future of CAP post 2020 are still very much in their early stages. Discussions to date have focused on the future orientation of the CAP, based on a number of priorities including building resilience, responding to environmental challenges to ensure sustainable intensification of food production, ensuring generational renewal, maintaining a market orientated CAP and ensuring an adequately funded CAP post 2020.

I am not aware of any specific proposals relating to the matter referred to by the deputy.

GLAS Payments

1054. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied). [13552/17]

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

1055. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13556/17]

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.

Energy Policy

1056. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if persons who use sludge for the growth of energy crops can still qualify for quality assurance in view of the fact the crop does not enter the food chain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13560/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Bord Bia Quality Mark can be applied to food that has been produced to the highest Bord Bia quality standards, and provides quality assurance to the food chain and is a critical element of both our national and international marketing agenda.

The quality assurance standards that must be complied with are drawn up by a panel of experts selected from various parts of the industry/supply chain and include independent scientific and food safety expertise. The main areas covered by the standards at the farm level include traceability, animal welfare, care for the environment and safe use of medicines and chemicals.

Under the quality assurance standards, sewage sludge cannot be used on any land owned or managed by a Quality Assurance member.

Food Exports

1057. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which a small farm (details supplied) may engage with the Food and Drug Administration agency in the United States with a view to pursuing export opportunities. [13564/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland can export the product referred to to the USA provided the food business operator is registered with the United States Food and Drugs Administration (FDA). Prior to registration, the company in question needs to comply with a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan at the production facility. HACCP is an international standard that all EU food companies must comply with.

The most straightforward way for the operator in question to register with the USDA is by using the on-line services at: www.fda.gov/food/guidanceregulation/foodfacilityregistration/default.htm.

The FDA must then receive advance notice on shipments of imported food prior to exportation, using a prior notification system:

www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/ImportsExports/Importing/ucm2006836.htm.

Should the Food Business Operator require any further assistance, the help line numbers in the US FDA are:

Registration with the FDA - 0013015750156

Prior Notification of import - 0017032618435.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1058. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons applying for the basic payment scheme, single payment scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme who had payments deducted as a result of any inspections conducted by his Department for each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and date in 2017, by county, in tabular form; the number who received penalties of less than 20%, 50% and maximum penalties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13609/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The extensive range of data requested is not readily available. Officials in my Department will collate the information requested and forward it directly to the Deputy.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1059. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for the basic payment scheme, single payment scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme who sought an internal review of the findings of his Department, by county, for each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number who received penalties of less than 20%, 50% and maximum penalties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13610/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated and will be forwarded at an early date.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1060. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for the basic payment scheme, single payment scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme who sought to appeal the findings to the agricultural appeals office, by county, in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number who received penalties of less than 20%, 50% and maximum penalties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13611/17]

1062. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of decisions of the appeals office that have been appealed by his Department for each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13613/17]

1063. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of appeals brought before the agricultural appeals office that dealt with the basic payment scheme for each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13614/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1060, 1062 and 1063 together.

It is not possible within the short timeframe to provide the detailed information requested by the Deputy. I will respond to the Deputy directly once the information has been collated.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1061. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for the basic payment scheme, single payment scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme who have made any kind of application to the High Court to review or appeal any decision of his Department for each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13612/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Please see the table of the number of persons that applied for the Basic Payment Scheme, Single Farm Payment Scheme, Disadvantaged Area Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme that have made any kind of application to the High Court to review or appeal any decision of his Department for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

Year	Number of Applicants
2017	1
2016	1
2015	0
2014	0
2013	1
2012	2
2011	1

Questions Nos. 1062 and 1063 answered with Question No. 1060.

GLAS Data

1064. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received in the latest tranche of the GLAS scheme; the number of these that have been or will be admitted to the scheme; the starting date for these persons in the scheme; the cut-off score in terms of points allocated to be successful in joining the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13643/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Almost 14,000 applications were submitted for the third tranche of GLAS (GLAS 3) on the online application system of which 12,600 have been accepted into the scheme to date with a starting date of 1st January 2017. The remaining 1,400 applications require further investigation. This work is on-going and until completed it is not possible to be definitive about the final number accepted into GLAS 3 but I am confident the majority of these applications will be successful.

All so called Tier 1 and Tier 2 applications which are delivering higher environmental benefits have been accepted into the Scheme and all Tier 3 applications which have met the minimum score of 16.5 as set out in the Scheme terms and conditions, have also been accepted into Scheme.

GLAS Data

1065. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who have not yet received their first payment for 2016 under the GLAS scheme, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13644/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set in the table.

Number of persons paid and unpaid for 2016 under the GLAS scheme

County	Number of persons paid	Number of persons not paid
Carlow	360	47
Cavan	1,216	129
Clare	2,099	213
Cork	2,727	457
Donegal	2,520	447
Dublin	64	16
Galway	3,680	737
Kerry	2,322	335
Kildare	282	51
Kilkenny	557	89
Laois	494	75
Leitrim	1,295	151
Limerick	1,188	170
Longford	794	72
Louth	193	36
Mayo	3,263	639
Meath	538	94

County	Number of persons paid	Number of persons not paid
Monaghan	648	77
Offaly	669	88
Roscommon	1,868	221
Sligo	1,198	120
Tipperary	1,409	250
Waterford	395	101
Westmeath	829	89
Wexford	872	174
Wicklow	404	83
Totals	31,884	4,961

GLAS Data

1066. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total payment under the GLAS scheme each year since its inception, including to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13645/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The amount paid under the GLAS scheme in 2015, 2016 and 2017 to date is set out in the table.

Amount paid under the GLAS scheme in 2015, 2016 and 2017 to date

Payment	GLAS 1	GLAS 2
Year	Payments	Payments
	Created	Created
2015	11,340,800.00	No Payments as scheme start date 1 January 2016.
2016	74,444,221.59	28,674,458.94
2017	9,809,287.80	6,347,970.87
Total	95,594,309.39	35,022,429.81

GLAS Payments

1067. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13656/17]

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 have examined this issue and the application is now being further processed for payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

GLAS Administration

1068. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if

he will rectify a records anomaly in the context of GLAS in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13665/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has not found an anomaly in the GLAS records in respect of the persons named.

In 2015 my Department put in place a procedure for the appointment of commonage advisors to prepare management plans for Commonage shareholders in GLAS. This procedure was followed and an approved advisor was assigned in September 2015 to prepare the commonage management plan for commonage H19714A comprising of LPIS parcels H197143357, H19714360, H19714433 and H19714434 and the name of the person assigned was published on my Department's website.

The persons named above are GLAS participants and the commonage identification number H19714A is quoted in their respective GLAS applications and received commonage payment in respect of the 2015 part year. As part of the 2016 payment process my Department issued an Interim Commonage Management Plan for H19714A to the assigned advisor in October 2016 for signature by the shareholders to allow 2016 payments to issue.

On reviewing the documentation in this case I note the persons named applied to have commonage H19714A sub-divided and on foot of this request in November 2016 identification number H19714F was created. However from a GLAS perspective specifically in respect of the preparation of a management plan as the commonage advisor was assigned to prepare a plan for the entire area contained in H19714A, including the area covered by H19714F, he remains the approved advisor for commonage H19714F and my officials will now instruct him to prepare a separate plan for Commonage H19714F.

GLAS Payments

1069. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13667/17]

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.

The application has successfully completed the GLAS prepayment checking process in respect of the 2015 scheme year and payment will issue at the earliest opportunity.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the application will be processed for the 2016 scheme year.

Laboratory Facilities

1070. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the fit-out costs for the newly designed containment laboratory at the Backweston facility in County Kildare are included in the declared costs; if the fit-out costs are not included the projected costs for this fit out, which is due to be handed over in May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13706/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department in collaboration with the Office of Public Works is currently developing a high contain-

ment laboratory at Backweston to enhance our National capability in the laboratory diagnosis of exotic viral diseases of farmed animals.

Aside from the costs of the building works, there will be an outlay on laboratory furnishings and equipment. The estimated total cost is €235,000, excluding VAT, and the items purchased will be subject to the usual public procurement processes.

Laboratory Facilities

1071. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the original contractors were not held liable for the faults in the original works in 2005 when the high containment laboratory was built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13707/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The inclusion of a high containment (bio-security level 4) laboratory suite in the original design of the laboratory complex at Backweston was informed by the experience of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) in Ireland and the UK in 2001. During that outbreak we were entirely dependent on the Pirbright Laboratory in the UK for laboratory diagnosis of suspect cases of disease. In addition, following on from "9/11" and more stringent regulations on air transport of dangerous goods, it became increasingly difficult to send samples from suspect cases to the UK. It therefore became essential to develop national capability in exotic viral disease diagnosis and to ensure we had a facility within which exotic viruses could be safely handled. The original specification for this containment laboratory was based on the UK Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) standard of that time.

In 2007, while officials in my Department and the Office of Public Works (OPW) were attempting to resolve some outstanding issues on the original Laboratory project, there was yet another FMD outbreak in the UK in 2007. This outbreak prompted an international revision of bio-containment standards for laboratories handling the virus. In Ireland this incident emphasised both the need to develop our own testing capability and the critical importance attaching to bio-containment standards.

It was therefore decided to progress amelioration works on the high containment laboratory suite at Backweston so that it could be operated at the highest international standard attainable (the Australia-New Zealand standard) rather than the MAFF standard which was now considered dated.

OPW is currently in consultation with the Chief State Solicitor's Office on pursuing the original contractor in respect of an underlying issue in the fabric of the original building uncovered during the current work.

Laboratory Facilities

1072. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are other expenditures involved in the redesign, build and commissioning of the high containment laboratory at the Backweston facility in County Kildare that have not been provided. [13708/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department, in collaboration with the Office of Public Works, is currently developing a high contain-

ment laboratory at Backweston to enhance our National capability in the laboratory diagnosis of exotic viral diseases of farmed animals.

It was decided to undertake amelioration works on a pre-existing laboratory space to achieve the highest attainable international standard of bio-containment – the Australia-New Zealand BSL4 standard. This decision followed an outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in the UK in 2007 which was associated with the escape of virus from the Pirbright laboratory facility.

Consequently, to address potential risk and have confidence that a building project would deliver a facility to the required certified standard the following steps were taken:- A US engineering firm (which specialises in building and retrofitting containment laboratories) was retained on contract to oversee the design, build and commissioning of the laboratory; their proposed building solution was implemented and tested in one part of the laboratory and the heat treatment and drainage system was redesigned. The total cost of this preparatory work was €954,080.

The tendered cost of the main building works was €4.9 million excluding VAT. However additional costs of €1.07m (broken down below) have accrued due to variations to the building contract as a result of specification or working method changes, or due to unforeseen circumstances. During the construction works an underlying issue in the fabric of the original building was discovered – this did not affect the stability of the structure but had the potential to compromise containment and required an engineering solution and was associated with project delays which cost €219,572. This is a highly specialised project, the first of its kind undertaken in Ireland, such that it was inevitable that some changes would be made during the building phase to ensure the required level of containment and building efficiency - these variations to bolster air-tightness and security and enhance integration with building controls amounted to €853,790 (ex. VAT).

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1073. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an agri-environment options scheme payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13710/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payments have 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly and payments due will issue then.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

1074. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Number 538 of 21 February 2017, when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13714/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named has already received full payment for year one under the Burren Farming for Conservation Scheme and therefore will not be receiving further payment for the first year of his Organic Farming Scheme contract. His year 2 payment under the Organic scheme is now being examined.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1075. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 529 of 21 February 2017, when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13715/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly and payments due will issue then.

GLAS Data

1076. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of outstanding GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 payments to be paid in County Kildare and nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13726/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy, including for county Kildare, is set out in the table.

Outstanding GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 payments

County	Number of Paid Cases	Number of Unpaid Cases
Carlow	360	47
Cavan	1,216	129
Clare	2,099	213
Cork	2,727	457
Donegal	2,520	447
Dublin	64	16
Galway	3,680	737
Kerry	2,322	335
Kildare	282	51
Kilkenny	557	89
Laois	494	75
Leitrim	1,295	151
Limerick	1,188	170
Longford	794	72

County	Number of Paid Cases	Number of Unpaid Cases
Louth	193	36
Mayo	3,263	639
Meath	538	94
Monaghan	648	77
Offaly	669	88
Roscommon	1,868	221
Sligo	1,198	120
Tipperary	1,409	250
Waterford	395	101
Westmeath	829	89
Wexford	872	174
Wicklow	404	83
Totals	31,884	4,961

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

1077. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the criteria for entry to the national reserve recently changed; his views on whether the new criteria discriminate against young farmers enrolled on green certificate courses due to finish after May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13728/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The National Reserve measure of the Basic Payment Scheme provides for an allocation of entitlements to eligible applicants.

In order to qualify for the 2017 National Reserve successful applicants must have completed their agricultural education course by 15th May 2017. Where an applicant has completed their course by 15th May but have not yet been awarded their certificate of education, a letter from the college should be enclosed with the National Reserve application form.

Under the 2015 National Reserve an exception was made which allowed students to qualify under the scheme before completion of their agricultural course. However, this exception did not receive the approval of the EU Commission. Consequently, in order to qualify for the 2017 National Reserve successful applicants must have completed their agricultural education course by 15th May 2017.

Decisions in relation to the National Reserve, including educational qualifications are made in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory Committee which includes members of the main farming bodies and advisory services. Full terms and Conditions of the 2017 National Reserve will be available later in March.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1078. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2016 basic payment scheme and young farmers scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13732/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2016 Transfer Application seeking the transfer of entitlements by lease.

Processing of this transfer application has been completed and a letter has issued to the person named confirming this.

The person named also submitted an application under the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme to my Department under the herd number shown which is jointly held by the person named and a young farmer. This application has now been fully processed, a letter has issued to confirm this and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme and the Young Farmer's Scheme will issue in the coming days.

GLAS Payments

1079. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13746/17]

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

1080. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13747/17]

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.

GLAS Data

1081. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in counties Cavan and Monaghan and throughout the country awaiting a GLAS payment, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13764/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy, including for counties Cavan and Monaghan, is set out in the table.

Paid and unpaid GLAS payments

County	Number of Paid Cases	Number of Unpaid Cases
Carlow	360	47
Cavan	1,216	129
Clare	2,099	213
Cork	2,727	457
Donegal	2,520	447
Dublin	64	16
Galway	3,680	737
Kerry	2,322	335
Kildare	282	51
Kilkenny	557	89
Laois	494	75
Leitrim	1,295	151
Limerick	1,188	170
Longford	794	72
Louth	193	36
Mayo	3,263	639
Meath	538	94
Monaghan	648	77
Offaly	669	88
Roscommon	1,868	221
Sligo	1,198	120
Tipperary	1,409	250
Waterford	395	101
Westmeath	829	89
Wexford	872	174
Wicklow	404	83
Totals	31,884	4,961

Animal Diseases

1082. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cases of mycoplasma bovis that have been brought to the attention of his Department for each year since 2007, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13775/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has readily available data from its Laboratory Information Management System going back to 2010 and this is presented in tabular form.

This data shows a steady increase in the number of recorded diagnoses of Mycoplasma bovis infection in cattle presented to the Department's Veterinary Laboratory Service for post mortem examination between 2010 to 2016, the last full year for which we have data.

Diagnostic data on deaths in cattle due to Mycoplasma bovis

Extract from the DAFM Laboratory Information Management System and based on results of post mortem examination – data extracted 16 March 2017

Mycoplasma bovis diagnoses by year

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	2	7	12	24	30	49	62

Mycoplasma bovis diagnoses by county and year

2010	County	Number of diagnoses
	Wexford	1
	Meath	1
	2010 total	2
2011		
	Cork	3
	Roscommon	1
	Laois	1
	Meath	1
	Westmeath	1
	2011 total	7
2012		
	Laois	1
	Cork	3
	Offaly	2
	Westmeath	2
	Tipperary	1
	Meath	2
	Roscommon	1
	2012 total	12
2013		
	Roscommon	2
	Cork	6
	Meath	6
	Galway	3
	Limerick	1
	Offaly	2
	Sligo	1
	Kilkenny	1
	Laois	1
	Wexford	1
	2013 total	24
2014		
	Donegal	1
	Cork	10
	Meath	2
	Westmeath	2

2010	County	Number of diagnoses
	Galway	2
	Wexford	1
	Limerick	2
	Louth	1
	Tipperary	2
	Laois	2
	Roscommon	1
	Kilkenny	1
	Mayo	1
	Offaly	1
	Tipperary	1
	2014 total	30
2015		
	Cork	3
	Donegal	3
	Dublin	1
	Galway	1
	Kerry	1
	Kildare	1
	Kilkenny	5
	Laois	2
	Limerick	1
	Louth	3
	Mayo	1
	Meath	2
	Offaly	4
	Roscommon	7
	Sligo	4
	Tipperary	1
	Westmeath	6
	Wexford	3
	2015 total	49
2016		
	Cavan	2
	Clare	2
	Cork	8
	Clare	1
	Donegal	1
	Galway	4
	Kerry	1
	Kildare	1
	Kilkenny	9

2010	County	Number of diagnoses
	Laois	3
	Leitrim	1
	Limerick	1
	Longford	2
	Mayo	3
	Meath	1
	Monaghan	1
	Offaly	4
	Roscommon	8
	Sligo	1
	Tipperary	2
	Westmeath	4
	Wexford	2
	2016 total	62

Animal Diseases

1083. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his Department's strategy for containing the mycoplasma bovis disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13776/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Mycoplasma bovis has no implications for public health, food safety or international trade. Therefore this infectious disease is not regulated in Ireland or the EU and as such, my Department does not have a specific strategy for containing it.

However my Department is currently developing a "Farmed Animal Health Strategy" (having recently undertaken public consultation on a draft document) and is also developing a long-term strategy for laboratory service delivery (arising from a Strategic Review of Laboratory Services). These strategies address different aspects of the leadership and supports my Department provides in dealing with non-regulated diseases of food-producing animals. In addition my Department provides significant financial and other supports for Animal Health Ireland which has responsibility for developing and promoting control programmes for non-regulated diseases.

Animal Diseases

1084. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports that his Department provides to farmers who discover mycoplasma bovis disease in their herds; if his Department offers preventative guidance to farmers in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13777/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Mycoplasma bovis is now considered to be endemic in the Irish cattle population; it is occasionally associated with respiratory disease, arthritis and mastitis in infected cattle. Infection in cattle is generally amenable to treatment and control when outbreaks occur, with appropriate professional and laboratory supports. Mycoplasma bovis has no implications for public health, food safety or international trade. Therefore this infectious disease is not regulated in Ireland or the EU.

The diagnosis, treatment, control and prevention of all non-regulated or "production" diseases of animals is a matter for animal keepers and their veterinary practitioners.

My Department supports the control of non-regulated diseases which may cause losses of livestock, animal welfare problems and financial hardship for farmers (including that associated with Mycoplasma bovis infection) by providing:

- a veterinary laboratory diagnostic service, provided by a network of Regional Veterinary Laboratories (post mortem examination and testing of clinical specimens) and the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory at Backweston

- field investigation of new and emerging disease problems when this is indicated

- contributions to the farming press and presentation to the practising veterinary profession, informed by the findings of field and laboratory investigations and advising on disease prevention and control

- support for Animal Health Ireland (AHI) in developing and disseminating educational materials on non-regulated diseases for farmers and veterinary practitioners.

GLAS Payments

1085. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a GLAS payment. [13787/17]

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

1086. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a GLAS payment. [13814/17]

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.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1087. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive an AEOS payment. [13870/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payments have 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 before payments can issue. 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. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly and payments due will issue then.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

1088. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the preparation of maps for the areas of natural constraints scheme review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13918/17]

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.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation 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.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

1089. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an appeals mechanism will be available to farmers when the revised maps are produced for the area of natural constraints scheme review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13919/17]

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.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation 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 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, and that there will be a channel for appeals in place.

GLAS Payments

1090. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a GLAS payment. [13952/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The herd number provided was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The person originally assigned to this herd number was approved for participation into

GLAS 2. My Department received a GLAS contract transfer request from the person named on 27 February 2017. This request is currently being processed by officials in my Department and once complete, the application will be further processed for payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

1091. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it is possible for a person (details supplied) to submit a late basic payment scheme application for 2015 and 2016, in view of the fact payments for 2013 and 2014 are only now issuing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13961/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have asked an official from my Department to forward application forms in respect of 2015 and 2016 to the person named. An application can be made on these forms and the case will be examined upon receipt of the application and any further documentation which the person named may consider to be relevant.

GLAS Data

1092. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in County Westmeath who have not received 85% of their total 2016 GLAS 1, GLAS 2 and AEOS payments; the reasons for this delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13968/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Some 654 farmers are active in GLAS 1 in Co. Westmeath of which 586 have been sent for payment with 68 remaining to be paid. For GLAS 2, 264 farmers are active in the scheme of which 243 have been sent for payment with 21 remaining to be paid.

For AEOS, 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 before payments can issue. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for AEOS 2 participants, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. These checks are on-going and payments are issued on a weekly basis as cases are cleared. 89 of 122 active scheme participants have been sent for payment with 33 remaining to be paid.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

1093. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in County Westmeath enrolled in the areas of natural constraint scheme; his plans to update the process of reviewing qualifying areas for the areas of natural constraint scheme; if his Department has completed the mapping exercise in County Westmeath; when the maps will be published; the consultation which will be undertaken with farmers in County Westmeath on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13969/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are 2,476 applicants under the 2016 ANC scheme in County Westmeath.

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.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation 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.

GLAS Payments

1094. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13981/17]

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 have examined this issue and the application is now being further processed for payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

Departmental Staff Data

1095. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 393 of 23 February 2017, if he will provide details with regard to the one member of staff currently suspended in his Department, in tabular form,

(details supplied). [14060/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department currently has a single employee suspended from work without prejudice, on full pay pending an investigation. Given that the requested information relates to a single individual, it has the potential to either identify that individual or to make information specific to that individual known to his/her colleagues or to others who may be aware of his/her suspension. As a result I am not in a position to provide any of the requested information at this time other than to say that no replacement salary costs have been incurred.

Sugar Industry

1096. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to reintroduce the growing of sugar beet and the manufacture of sugar therefrom here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14116/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): By way of explanation I would like to give the Deputy a short background to this issue. In 2011 my Department officials met with two separate groups which had conducted feasibility studies into the possibility of establishing a new sugar and bioethanol production facility, using sugar beet, in this country. The figures published by the interested groups who are investigating the possibility of building a new facility, indicate that the overall capital costs involved could range from €250 million to €400 million, depending on what type of facility will be constructed.

My Department officials have informed both groups that any venture to develop a combined sugar/bioethanol production facility in Ireland, would have to be a viable commercial proposition, and supported by a sufficiently robust business case in order to attract the funding from investors for the very substantial capital investment required. My Government colleague Minister Coveney informed both groups at the time that it was his job to look for agreement at EU level to allow for the growing of sugar beet for the manufacture of sugar, at the earliest possible date. In this connection, he secured agreement as part of the overall CAP reform package at the final EU Council of Agriculture Ministers, which he chaired in June 2013, to abolish all sugar quotas by 30 September 2017. This agreement removes, with effect from 1 October 2017, the current EU quota barrier for operators in Ireland or other Member State, wishing to re-establish a sugar industry.

The current Programme for a Partnership Government makes clear that "State enterprise bodies will be asked to examine any substantial business plans related to rebuilding the industry with a view to considering appropriate State supports". It is now up to those interested parties to move the project forward and to garner sufficient commercial and financial support to turn their plans into a viable reality.

Departmental Legal Costs

1097. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors' firms involved; the junior and senior barristers who provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14125/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Amount spent

externally on legal advice for each year since 2015.

Year 2015	Name of Firm	Name of Barrister Junior/Senior	Amount paid€
	PP Ryan & Co Solicitors		17,055

Year 2016	Name of Firm	Name of BarristerJunior/Senior	Amount paid €
	PP Ryan & Co Solicitors		2,787

Year 2017 to date	Name of Firm	Name of BarristerJunior/Senior	Amount paid €
			Nil

My Department generally avails of the legal services of the Chief State Solicitor's Office. However, occasionally it engages private Solicitor Firms and Junior and Senior Counsel for external legal advice. Details of such engagements are provided in the table for 2015 and 2016. Currently there is no expenditure on legal advice for 2017.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1098. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 210 of 22 February 2017, if he will review the case of a person (detail supplied). [14187/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As previously notified to the Deputy, the person named was notified in writing on 17 September 2014 of the outcome of this field visit and was advised of her right to appeal within 4 months of this date if she did not agree with the findings. She subsequently wrote to my Department in May 2015 and July 2016. However, no specific details regarding a basis or reason for an appeal were submitted.

An official from my Department has made direct contact with the person named regarding this matter.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

1099. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision was made that inspections being carried out by the Revenue Commissioners on behalf of his Department under the geographical indicators scheme would be carried out on an annual basis; the reason that the scale of fees charged does not relate to the size of distillery involved; his plans to revise these fees to encourage the development of micro distilleries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14189/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under Regulation (EC) 110/2008 my Department submitted technical files, developed with industry bodies for the Irish Cream, Irish Poitín and Irish Whiskey geographical indications, to the European Commission by 15 February 2015 as required.

A tailored verification scheme has been put in place to check that these spirit drinks adhere

to the production standards in the technical files. The verifications are carried out by Department Dairy Inspectors in respect of Irish Cream and by the Revenue Commissioners in respect of Irish Poitín and Irish Whiskey. Following discussions with the Revenue Commissioners and industry it was decided in 2015 that three annual inspections would take place, commencing in 2016, to ensure that all distilleries remained familiar and complied with the requirements of the technical files, and that an evaluation of the process including the appropriate level of fees would subsequently be undertaken.

Charges for inspections are a legal requirement under Article 22.1 of Regulation (EC) 110/2008. The current charges were set following discussions with the Revenue Commissioners and within the Department on the resources deployed in carrying out the verification process, which is common to all distilleries.

The verification system provides important support for the reputation and protection of Irish Whiskey, Irish Cream and Irish Poitín. The recent growth in Irish Whiskey exports has enabled us to begin the re-establishment of the Irish Whiskey industry to its former pre-eminent position, generating exports, employment and impact on the rural economy where many of the new distilleries are located.

Fishing Vessel Licences

1100. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the review of replacement capacity requirements under the sea-fishing boat licensing policy will be completed; when the conclusions of the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14190/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As Minister I have responsibility for policy in relation to sea-fishing boat licensing under Section 3(3) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, as amended by Section 99 of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006. In this context and, as referred to above, Section 3 of the Act makes provision for Ministerial Policy Directives to issue to the independent Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats. I am, however, precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to individual cases, or a group of cases, with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned under Section 3(5) of the 2003 Act.

I received proposals from a Producer Organisation (PO) which in summary relate to the possibility of reducing the requirement to provide 100% replacement capacity with the relevant track record to 80% (the balance being sourced from capacity without track record). I undertook a public consultation process on these proposals and made a consultation paper available which set out the background to fleet policy and carried out an analysis of the current situation. The document examined the implications of the proposals made by the Producer Organisations and also put forward alternative options. This consultation ended on 28 February 2017.

26 submissions were received in this regard and they are currently being examined. I will carefully consider, following any further analysis needed, the case for amendment(s) to current licensing policy, taking into account the submissions received and will have my conclusions published on the Department's website, as early as possible.

Basic Payment Scheme

1101. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the reason he did not impose some percentage clawback on leasing of entitlements without land to help fund the national reserve, as was agreed with eight other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14210/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In accordance with the EU Regulations governing the operation of the Basic Payment Scheme, each Member State has the option to apply 'clawback' to the transfer of entitlements without land. Ireland opted to apply clawback on the sale of entitlements without land.

EU Regulations state that the application of "clawback" must not present a substantial obstacle or prohibition of the transfer of entitlements in a Member State. Ireland is one of the only Member States in the EU that operate a "conacre" system, and widespread corresponding short term leasing of entitlements. In many cases the only option open to Irish farmers at risk of losing entitlements due to non usage is to lease entitlements without land to a farmer who has "naked" hectares to use them, thereby safeguarding their assets. The introduction of "clawback" on leased entitlements would present a significant obstacle to this option.

The option to lease entitlements without land is critical for many Irish farmers who are unable to obtain sufficient hectares of land to use their entitlements annually. Under the Single Payment scheme the rotation of entitlements safeguarded farmers' entitlements but this is not available under the Basic Payment Scheme where 100% of farmers' entitlements must be used at least once every two years. A large number of farmers in Ireland depend on the availability of affordable leased/ rented land to use their entitlements. If farmers are unable to obtain leased/ rented land through unavailability or high price they are at risk of losing their Basic Payment scheme entitlements permanently through non-usage. In many cases the only option open to them is to lease their entitlements without land to a farmer who has naked hectares to use them, thereby safeguarding their assets.

Decisions in relation to Basic payment Scheme entitlements including the National Reserve and 'clawback' are made in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory group which includes members of the main farming bodies and agricultural education and advisory services. Following consultation with this group a decision was made to reduce the level of 'clawback' on the sale of entitlements without land from 50% in 2016 to 20% in 2017. The group did not express support for the option to apply 'clawback' to the lease of entitlements without land.

Basic Payment Scheme

1102. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Government sought permission from the EU to not impose clawback on leasing of entitlements without land that it had agreed to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14211/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In accordance with the EU Regulations governing the operation of the Basic Payment Scheme, each Member State has the option to apply 'clawback' to the transfer of entitlements without land. Decisions pertaining to the use of such optional provisions are taken by Member States and do not require approval of the EU. Ireland has applied such a 'clawback' to the sale of entitlements without land and has informed the EU Commission accordingly.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

1103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to ANC payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14258/17]

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.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation 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 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. The categorisation of designations and linked payment levels will be examined based on the outcome of the technical work I have outlined. It is envisaged that stakeholders will be consulted as this process develops.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

1104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to the funding of ANC payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14259/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out the commitment to increase the budget for the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. In parallel, the Rural Development Regulation requires all Member States to designate eligible areas under the ANC Scheme by reference to new biophysical criteria by 2018. The technical work underlying this process is currently underway, and the new scheme which emerges from this process will incor-

porate the commitment to the additional €25m in funding.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

1105. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a suggestion with regard to the payment rates of ANCs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14260/17]

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.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation 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 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. The categorisation of designations, such as hill/mountain areas, and linked payment levels will be examined based on the outcome of the technical work I have outlined. It is envisaged that stakeholders will be consulted as this process develops.

GLAS Payments

1106. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a GLAS payment. [14265/17]

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.

The application has now successfully completed the 2015 balancing prepayment checking process and payment will issue at the earliest opportunity.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the 2016 scheme year payment will be processed.

Ministerial Allowances

1107. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14560/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Two former Ministers of State were paid overnight expenses on 29 occasions when attending events in Dublin during the period since 2011.

Waste Disposal Charges

1108. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a final agreement will be reached in relation to bin charges; the measures that will be put in place for families throughout the country with sanitary waste that are being penalised with the pay by weight system through no fault of their own; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12978/17]

1140. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are any plans in place to bring in a waste disposal relief scheme for those families and carers that look after young persons and adults that need to use incontinence pads and adult nappies on a long-term basis, to help relieve the added financial burden that the disposal of these items will take on them once the pay by weight disposal scheme comes on line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8831/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1108 and 1140 together.

The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

My Department is currently reviewing, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives, the introduction of an incentivised pricing system for household waste collection. Incentivised pricing aims to encourage people to prevent, reduce and segregate their waste, to reduce our reliance on landfill for waste disposal in light of the landfill capacity emergencies that occurred in 2016, and also facilitates providing a range of options for people to manage their waste costs. The issue raised by the Deputies will be considered as part of the review.

Fisheries Offences

1109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which his attention was drawn to Inland Fisheries Ireland not having the power to prosecute offences under the Fisheries Acts (details supplied); his plans to amend this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13180/17]

1117. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which his attention was drawn to Inland Fisheries Ireland not having the power to prosecute offences under the Fisheries Acts, in view of a communication issued by his department to that agency (details supplied); the legal advice with which he has been furnished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13182/17]

1118. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of legal cases which have already been determined by the courts but for which an appeal against the ruling has been taken by the defendant, in view of a communication issued by his department to Inland Fisheries Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13183/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1109, 1117 and 1118 together.

The Office of the Attorney General provided advice to my Department in the course of a review of the Inland Fisheries Act 2010 in February. My Department advised Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) of the relevant position. It should be noted that anyone who commits an offence is still liable to be prosecuted under the Act. Amending legislation is being drafted as a matter of priority.

The administration of cases in the Courts is not a matter for my Department and cases in being will take their course before the Courts.

Alternative Energy Projects

1110. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there will be a price set and some form of price regulation put in place to allow persons assess the economic viability of the investment before they proceed with respect to persons that invest in biodigesters and the resultant gas production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13561/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2015 White Paper on Energy Policy recognises the important contribution that technologies such as Anaerobic Digestion (AD) can make to Ireland's future low carbon energy transition. Over the last year, my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) undertook a detailed assessment of the costs and viability of supporting a range of renewable energy technologies - including AD - as part of the on-going work to support the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive.

The introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is a commitment in the White Paper on Energy and Programme for Government and will be the primary support mechanism in the heating sector designed to meet Ireland's renewable energy obligations. The aim of the RHI is to build on the progress already made in the renewable heating sector and to help reach Ireland's 12% target by 2020. In 2015, 6.5% of heat was derived from renewable sources in Ireland.

The proposed RHI scheme is aimed at supporting larger industrial and commercial installations outside of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources.

Prior to a final decision being taken on the overall costs and technologies to be supported, an analysis is underway of all submissions received to the final public consultation on the RHI which closed on 3 March 2017. Ultimately, the rate the RHI tariff is set at will be a factor of the renewable heat technology in question, the size of the boiler or unit and the sustainability and air qualify criteria that form part of the new scheme.

Before a new RHI scheme is introduced, the scheme will be subject to Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission. It is expected that the RHI scheme will be introduced before the end of the year.

Postal Services

1111. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether the increase to €1 on the price of a postal stamp will deter persons using stamps and further affect revenue at An Post; his further views on whether it will help revenue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13766/17]

1129. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address the concerns of persons in counties Cavan and Monaghan that are of the view that the increase in the price of the postage stamp to €1 will be the death of sending the Christmas card and letters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13769/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1111 and 1129 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the Communications Regulation (Postal Services) Act 2016 recently passed through all stages in the Oireachtas and has now been signed into law by the President. The legislation provides for the repeal of the current price cap mechanism which will enable An Post to implement the proposed price increases.

The mails business is undergoing a profound structural change both here and internationally. Electronic substitution has had a significant impact on the letters business. This development is particularly apparent in terms of large volume postal customers such as banks and utility providers. The trend which has been evident for some years accelerated in 2016 resulting in a serious financial impact for An Post. It should be noted that internationally the mails and post office businesses are experiencing long term structural challenges so this is not just an issue facing An Post.

One of the main elements of the postal service here in Ireland is the daily delivery of post to every address in the State. I am extremely cognisant of the value placed on this service by communities in both rural and urban areas and recognise the importance of ensuring that An Post has the capacity to continue to fulfil its obligations in this area. The introduction of legislation to effectively enable An Post to increase the price of the stamp was considered the most viable option for supporting An Post in the short term while a restructuring plan is developed and implemented. This is not a decision that was taken lightly. NewERA has conducted an in-depth review of the company in recent months on behalf of the shareholding Ministers and has confirmed the seriousness of the situation facing the company.

I too was concerned that this legislation would have the effect of accelerating the decline

in mail volume and it is an issue I raised directly with An Post when the Bill was being drafted. Having evaluated the situation, An Post is satisfied pricing represents the best approach to secure the financial viability pending consideration of restructuring options. While volume decline is a feature of the postal markets both here and internationally, it is difficult to disaggregate the impact of pricing from other factors affecting postal volumes such as e-substitution. In terms of a suite of options to support the financial viability of national postal operators, pricing is playing a significant part in supporting the continuation of daily postal services.

Postal Services

1112. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if proposals to provide financial assistance to An Post have been provided to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; if he has consulted with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12788/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are no proposals to provide financial assistance to An Post and consequently the need to consult with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard has not arisen. My Department is, however, in regular contact with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the financial challenges facing the company; the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Cabinet have also been briefed on this issue.

Broadband Service Provision

1113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of plans to extend broadband cover to a location (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12811/17]

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 rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications

providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

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.

The map currently indicates that 68% of the townland of Fountainstown will be covered by commercial operators while the remaining 32% of the townland of Fountainstown will be part of the State Intervention.

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: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 invest-

ment in mobile and broadband services. Since July, there has been significant progress made in discussions with the key stakeholders including local authority management representatives, 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 Co Cork.

Question No. 1114 answered with Question No. 59.

Broadband Service Provision

1115. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason the Beaulieu area in County Louth has been overlooked with regard to having a fibre broadband cabinet when there are cabinets installed in Drogheda and as far out as Aston village, Termonfeckin and Clogherhead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12993/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE on the High Speed Broadband Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process.

Individuals can check whether their premises are in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

The Beaulieu area referred to by the Deputy falls within an AMBER area and will there be

included In the State Intervention procurement process under the NBP.

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: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.

Mobile Telephony Services

1116. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has contacted ComReg regarding the decision by some mobile phone companies not to make available to their customers all the benefits with regard to data that should accrue with the new EU roaming charges due to come into effect in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13138/17]

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, 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 with 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).

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.

Questions Nos. 1117 and 1118 answered with Question No. 1109.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

1119. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason window replacement is not covered in the better energy warmer homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13241/17]

1120. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration will be given to a grant for the replacement of windows that provide energy savings for homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13242/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1119 and 1120 together.

The measures currently offered under both the Better Energy Homes and Better Energy Warmer Homes schemes were selected as the best balance that could be achieved between the resources available to the schemes, the number of homes that can receive support and the

energy savings that can delivered. In short, the measures supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost to the highest number of people. While upgrading windows does improve the energy efficiency of a home, the cost of this measure is high in relation to the energy efficiency gains made.

Nevertheless as we move towards deeper renovation of homes, as will be necessary to meet our 2020 and 2030 climate and energy goals, window replacement could become cost effective as part of a wider package of upgrades to the fabric of a building. My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are now testing out the channels for carrying out deeper renovation in homes across the country to inform future policy.

For this reason window upgrades are eligible for funding under the Better Energy Communities scheme in 2017, when carried out as part of a combined fabric upgrade, which also includes upgrades to insulation, ventilation and doors. Grant funding is available for up to 50% of the cost of these works in homes.

Additionally, under the Warmth and Wellbeing pilot scheme, which is led by my Department in collaboration with the Department of Health, energy efficient windows and doors are installed wherever a surveyor deems them necessary. Earlier this month I announced that homes with particularly low thermal efficiency, that qualify for the Warmer Homes Scheme, will now be eligible for a deeper retrofit package in addition to the currently funded measures.

I have also requested SEAI to review the measures that are supported through the SEAI home energy grant schemes and the results of this review will inform any future measures that may be offered.

The Deputy may also note that the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government funds the Housing Aid for Older People scheme. This scheme is administered by Local Authorities and provides grants to older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out. Eligible works include structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, repairs to (or replacement of), windows and doors, provision of water supply, sanitary facilities and heating.

Energy Efficiency

1121. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the Government has participated in an energy efficiency audit on buildings owned by the State in an effort to save money on energy bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13243/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland has a national energy efficiency target of 20% by 2020. The public sector has a critical leadership role to play on energy efficiency working towards a more ambitious 33% energy efficiency target in the same period. Very significant public sector gains have already been made with a 21% improvement in energy efficiency achieved by the end of 2015. This equates to €154 million in avoided energy spend and 548,000 tonnes of emissions mitigated in 2015 alone.

To drive the achievement of the 33% target I have recently published the first Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy. Central to the Strategy is the implementation of structured energy management.

Energy audits have long been recognised as a key tool in energy management. The Strategy

reiterates the requirement on public sector bodies to undertake energy auditing in line with EU and Irish legislation. It sets a phased timetable for compliance based on the scale of energy spend. Many public sector bodies are already participating in the "Optimising Power at Work" programme run by the OPW and energy audits are taking place as part of that initiative. Good examples of the benefits of energy management are already being seen with a number of large public sector energy users already achieving the international ISO 50001 certification.

Broadband Service Provision

1122. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of fast broadband to Lynn Cross, Mullingar, County Westmeath. [13267/17]

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 rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The maps shows that 78% of the townland of Lynn, Co Westmeath falls within the AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State intervention procurement process. The remaining 22% of Lynn 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 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 from contract award 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: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.

Ambulance Service

1123. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the removal of an ambulance call centre (details supplied) from a new and revised contract agreement which had previously been stipulated as a designated centre for the purpose of service provision; if the terms of this revised document do not require the contracted party to retain the centre as part of the agreement; if he will consider amending the revised contract with a view to have the centre included as part of the agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13318/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I assume the Question is referring to the Emergency Call Answering Service call centre in Ballyshannon and not the National Ambulance Service call centre.

The contract for a new Emergency Call Answering Service Operator is subject to a procurement process which commenced on 15 April 2016. This procurement process is currently on-going and is being conducted in accordance with the relevant national public procurement policy and European Union Directive 2004/18/EC.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

1124. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will confirm that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13339/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The One Person One Salary policy introduced by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has been brought to the attention of the bodies under the aegis of my Department and compliance in this regard is being observed. Worker Directors are excluded from this policy in relation to board fees.

Broadcasting Service Provision

1125. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for the longwave mast at Clarkestown, County Meath; the nature of its functions; if it will be decommissioned; and if there will be measurement of its emissions. [13484/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The RTÉ mast referred to by the Deputy has been used to transmit RTÉ Radio 1 longwave service on 252 kHz since 2004, enabling RTÉ Radio 1 to be broadcast to Irish communities in Britain. In September 2014, RTÉ announced plans to shut down the service. While the initial plan was to close the long wave service on 27 October 2014, the proposed closure has been deferred to allow for further research to be undertaken and for engagement to take place with relevant representative groups, including those in the UK. As part of this, the Government's emigrant support programme, administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, has provided support for research into the listenership figures in Britain. The purpose of

this research was to obtain concrete data on the current listenership and also to explore the possibility of continuing the service using alternate technologies.

Overseeing the research was a consultative group of key stakeholders composed of representatives of RTÉ, the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade officials and representatives of the Irish community in Britain. On 10th March, the consultative group issued a statement of agreed recommendations in respect of RTÉ's longwave radio service, which will now continue until the end of June 2019.

In terms of future plans for the mast, RTÉ is an independent national public service broadcaster and, as such, I have no role in operational matters such as decisions in relation to network infrastructure. As the appropriate licensing authority, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is responsible for ensuring that all communications operators comply with their licence conditions in the use of radio spectrum. This includes conditions relating to non-ionising radiation and emissions from each transmitter operated under licence must comply with the latest international guidelines.

Broadband Service Provision

1126. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he envisages the roll out of fibre broadband to the area of Hollymount, Ballinrobe, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13608/17]

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 rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The maps shows that 100% of the townland of Hollymount Demesne, Co. Mayo, falls within

the AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State intervention procurement process.

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 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 from contract award 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: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.

Broadband Service Provision

1127. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific criteria used in designating specific geographic areas either blue or amber in the national broadband roll out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13619/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE on the High Speed Broadband Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process.

The Map is a requirement under EU State Aid Guidelines. In 2014, following a comprehensive analysis and mapping process of high speed broadband availability across the entire country, the Department published the High Speed Broadband Map.

The Department has kept the map under review ever since, keeping track of both developments in the BLUE area and proposed new plans by commercial operators within the AMBER areas.

In late 2015, following consultation, the Department updated the map and published a Document "Managing the High Speed Broadband Map" which sets out the criteria, to be used to assess new commercial high speed broadband investment plans pre, during and post procurement. The criteria include technical, deployment and financial assessment criteria. The Document is available on my the Departments website:

www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/SiteCollectionDocuments/Broadband/Updated%20Expert%20reports/Managing%20IA%20Map%20-%20Consultation%20Paper%20FINAL%2021-12-15.pdf.

In addition, the Department published the Heads of a legal Commitment Agreement for operators who wish their plans to be represented on the High Speed Broadband Map.

Together, the assessment criteria and the Commitment Agreement ensure that the veracity and robustness of proposed commercial deployment plans can be fully scrutinised ahead of any changes to the map.

Illegal Dumping

1128. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the full details of a new initiative launched on 13 March 2017 to crack down on illegal dumping that will include the greater use of smart technology and more community engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13762/17]

1145. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is expected that the spending increase on prevention of illegal dumping will be continued into future fiscal years; the amount of the added expense that will be offset by the revenue from fines collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14142/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1128 and 1145 together.

The Programme for Government contains a specific commitment to work with local authorities to tackle the problem of illegal dumping and to develop effective deterrents to discourage people from engaging in this anti-social behaviour. In accordance with this commitment, my Department has developed an Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations.

Applications for funding from local authorities have been invited for consideration by the relevant Waste Enforcement Regional Local Authority (WERLA) subject to the selection criteria developed for this purpose. This includes monitoring and surveillance of dumping black-spots and the development of an integrated and effective approach to dealing with this issue.

An allocation of €650,000 from the Environment Fund has been made to support this initiative. Funding will be prioritised for projects where community groups and other state agencies work in partnership to clean-up and prevent illegal dumping and where effective enforcement actions are being undertaken by local authorities.

While no decision has yet been taken with respect to funding beyond 2017, it is anticipated that the investment now being made in equipping local authorities with the latest technologies available to support enforcement of our waste laws will deliver improved enforcement outcomes year on year and result in an increase in revenue from fines collected. Financial penalties for serious dumping offences available under the Waste Management Acts are substantial and range from a maximum fine of €3,000 on summary conviction to a maximum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and represent an opportunity to significantly defray enforcement and clean up costs.

Question No. 1129 answered with Question No. 1111.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

1130. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an exemption can be granted to a society (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13780/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or the 'smoky coal ban' as it is commonly known, has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels within the areas it applies, with an associated significant improvement in public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone. Residential burning of coal is a key source of air pollution and, as such, there is a commitment to extend the smoky coal ban nationwide by 2018.

I launched a consultation paper on the first ever National Clean Air Strategy on 1 March. The Strategy will provide the framework for a set of cross-Government policies and actions, including the smoky coal ban, to reduce harmful emissions and their associated health impacts, by improving our air quality.

While at this point I do not envisage exemptions from the national ban on bituminous coal, I would welcome a submission from the Irish Steam Preservation Society as part of the Clean Air Strategy consultation currently underway, details of which can be found on my Department's website at http://dccae.gov.ie/energy/en-ie/Pages/Consultation/National-Clean-Air-Strategy.aspx.

Post Office Network

1131. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his assessment of the value and range of services which post offices provide to local communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13785/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am extremely cognisant of the value placed by communities in both rural and urban areas on services provided by post offices. Post offices, among other things, make Government and financial services locally available, provide a social centre for a community and encourage spending in local economies. They also play an important role in delivering social welfare payments to the public. It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong, viable company and in a position to provide a high quality, nationwide postal service and that it maintains a nationwide customer-focused network of post offices in the community. However, the postal sector as a whole is undergoing systemic change as a result of the growth of the digital economy. The continuing decline in mail volumes, combined with the ongoing impact of e-substitution on retail businesses transacted through the post office network, is a significant challenge for the company and has an impact on its financial well-being.In recognition of the changing commercial environment within which An Post operates, my predecessor established the Post Office Network Business Development Group, the remit of which was to examine the potential from existing and new Government and commercial business that could be transacted through the post office network. The final report of this Group was published in January 2016. On foot of the reconfiguration of Government Departments in July last, responsibility for the post office network transferred to my colleague the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with particular responsibility for implementation of the aforementioned report. In my role in respect of the corporate governance of An Post, I have impressed upon

the company the importance of giving its support and assistance to Minister Humphreys and Minister Ring as work is progressed on bringing about new opportunities for the nationwide network of post offices.

Question No. 1132 answered with Question No. 66.

Fisheries Protection

1133. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of protection staff assigned to the river Nore and Nore estuary, Kilkenny; if vacancies created by retirement have been filled; the number of cases of illegal fishing prosecuted relative to the Nore, Kilkenny; the action taken by his Department arising from local media reports on illegal fishing at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13829/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that there are currently nine fulltime IFI officers involved, amongst other duties, in policing illegal fishing activity in an area that covers the River Barrow, Nore and Suir catchments.

IFI plans to employ three additional temporary staff for 6 months during 2017 to supplement the full time staff during the busy fishing season.

The operational area for these officers also includes a number of other rivers which flow directly to the sea along the Wexford and Waterford coasts including the River Mahon, Colligan, Tay, Owenduff and Corock. The freshwater and tidal sections of all of these rivers as well as the Wexford and Waterford coastline are policed by these officers.

The total land area covered by these officers is 10,260 km2 . The River Barrow, Nore and Suir range in length from 87 to 119 miles and these rivers or their tributaries flow through 10 counties.

Three individuals have been prosecuted on the River Nore since 2014.

The officers patrol these areas in a means which optimises resource deployment by using innovative technology such as covert surveillance and kayak and jet-ski patrols. Operations target known poaching hotspots and areas and times when illegal activity is likely to be greatest. This involves protection over a 24 hour, 7 days per week period and often involves night-time policing and unscheduled responses to reported incidents. All reports of illegal activity are investigated.

IFI has a telephone hotline 1890 34 74 24 to facilitate anglers and others in reporting any suspicious activity.

Salmon Conservation Scheme

1134. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to fund the works required on the river Nore, Kilkenny to remove blockages along the river for the safe passage of fish; the work programme and locations along the Nore at which funding will be spent to improve the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13830/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) manages the Salmon Conservation Fund (SCF) which is used to promote the recovery of our salmon stocks and habitats taking into account project feasibility, funding availability and value for money considerations.

The SCF is funded from the sale of salmon angling and commercial fishing licences which represents a major contribution by licence holders to wild salmon conservation.

Fishery Owners, Angling Clubs, Commercial Fishermen and Inland Fisheries Ireland can apply to this fund for projects which will enhance the conservation status of our fisheries resource.

I am advised by IFI that they successfully completed a very significant infrastructural project in 2014 which significantly improved fish passage at a large weir at Castletown on the River Nore. In addition, IFI are currently undertaking a project, funded by SCF, involving pruning and bank stabilisation works on the Kings River, an important tributary of the River Nore. This project will enhance fisheries habitat in the river.

IFI are also exploring potential works on a number of other barriers on the Nore system, which are considered to impede the free movement of fish. A significant amount of preliminary work goes into bringing projects to planning stage particularly in relation to land owner and fishery owner permissions, technical challenges and resource capacity.

IFI will continue to explore opportunities for habitat improvement works. Where such opportunities exist projects are assessed on feasibility, resource availability and value for money considerations.

Fisheries Protection

1135. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a compensation package will be put in place for eel fishermen that can no longer fish for eel due to restrictions for conservation purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13831/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP) under EU Regulation 1100/2007, which included a closure of commercial fishing, was approved by the European Commission in 2009. Ireland's EMP and its conservation measures were reviewed in 2012 and again in 2015 in accordance with the EU Regulation. Both reviews involved an examination of the latest scientific data and the conservation measures, the results of which were the subject of public consultation processes. Based on management advice from Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and having considered all aspects of the 2015 review, the existing conservation measures remain in place up to mid-2018 at which time a further review is required. IFI have been provided funding for a new collaborative research initiative involving IFI scientists and a number of former eel fishermen to further develop national knowledge of the species and its medium to longer term potential for recovery. This scientific fishery was commenced in 2016 and is expected to continue for three years to increase data and knowledge ahead of further review of eel management measures in 2018.

The latest advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) for 2016 (published October 2015) is that "the status of eel remains critical and that all anthropogenic mortality (e.g. recreational and commercial fishing, hydropower, pumping stations, and pollution) affecting production and escapement of silver eels should be reduced to – or kept

as close to – zero as possible. There is no change in the status of the stock as being critically endangered".

While I recognise fully the difficulty facing eel fishermen, there is no property right attaching to public eel licences and the issue of compensation does not arise.

Fishing Licences

1136. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of money collected by IFI relative to fishing licences; the number of fisherman paying the extra €25.00 to support conservation measures; the amount collected to date; the amount spent to date and the details of that spend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13833/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) manages the Salmon Conservation Fund (SCF) and the individual contribution to the Salmon Conservation Fund is 50% of the total cost of the salmon fishing licence fee payable. Details of funds collected by IFI in each year from 2007 to 2016 for the Salmon Conservation Fund are shown in the following table. Expenditure from the fund to 2015 and the number of fishermen paying the conservation component are also included.

Year	No. of Anglers	No. of Commercial fishermen	Total Funds collected	Amount of Spend to date	Status
2007	19,869	161	€636,858	€450,363	Closed off
2008	19,914	160	€697,186	€400,217	Closed off
2009	18,314	187	€654,157	€365,276	Closed off
2010	17,982	178	€579,552	€467,049	Ongoing
2011	19,899	268	€607,704	€446,682	Ongoing
2012	19,588	250	€555,799	€305,868	Ongoing
2013	19,109	238	€541,070	€312,637	Ongoing
2014	18,085	159	€512,248	€164,192	Ongoing
2015	18,460	110	€508,221	€68,438	Ongoing
2016	18,303	110	€504,452	N/A	Funds to be allocated in 2017

In 2016, €504,452 was collected from the sale of salmon angling and commercial fishing licences and funds will be allocated in 2017 to suitable projects. Some suitable projects may proceed in part only or may not proceed. Any underspends in projects or funds decommitted are carried forward to the next year for reallocation to additional projects.

From 2007 to 2016, there were in excess of 230 projects allocated funding under the salmon conservation fund and details can be found within the 'Salmon Conservation Fund Reports' for each of the years 2007 to 2015 on the IFI website: www.fisheriesireland.ie/Salmon-Management/salmon-conservation-fund.html.

If the Deputy requires copies of reports or has a specific case or cases in mind, I would be happy to ask IFI to provide briefing.

Salmon Hardship Scheme

1137. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the provision of a compensation package to buy out snap net fishermen on the river Nore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13835/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Salmon Hardship Scheme was introduced following a Government decision in 2006 to cease, for conservation reasons, the commercial salmon mixed stock fishery. Under the scheme, fishermen active in the commercial salmon fishery could opt to voluntarily cease fishing and undertake not to seek a licence in the future. Payments to individuals were based on verifiable track record and recorded catches in the five years prior to its introduction. In excess of €25 million was allocated to the scheme to facilitate payments to fishermen, with a further €5 million provided for community development projects. The average payment to former fishermen under the scheme was some €23,000. The scheme closed for applications on 31 December 2007 and ceased in 2008. I understand that all funds were expended and there are currently no plans to revisit such a scheme.

Inland Fisheries

1138. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a fish counter will be provided as promised by IFI and the OPW on the River Nore, Kilkenny City. [13874/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the state agency responsible for the protection, management, development and conservation of Ireland's inland fisheries. IFI manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland's 147 salmon rivers (including river sections and estuaries) has its own genetically unique stock of salmon.

IFI is supported in its management role by an independent Standing Scientific Committee on Salmon (SSC). Scientific and management assessments of each stock including the Nore are carried out every year.

The SSC estimates the number of salmon likely to return to each river in the next fishing season based on salmon runs over the most recent five years to determine if each river is meeting its individual conservation limit to maintain a healthy population. If the estimate of returning salmon is above this limit, then salmon from that individually genetic river population may be harvested commercially or by rod and line.

Fish counters are a component element of the national assessment array in use by the SSC. In carrying out salmon stock assessments, the Committee draws on a number of data sets, including rod and commercial catch data, fish counters and catchment wide electro-fishing. The primary index for evaluation of likely returning numbers is the recorded rod (harvest or catch and release) and commercial catch (if any), averaged over the previous 5 years. Fish counters are particularly useful in cases where rod or commercial data is not available. In addition, information on juvenile abundance indices, derived from electro-fishing surveys carried out annually by IFI, is also evaluated as an indicator of stock status.

The salmon assessment methodologies used in Ireland are considered internationally as best practice with many other countries moving towards the development of similar scientific assessment models for salmon stock conservation.

Given the availability of catch records on the majority of rivers including the River Nore which is open for Catch and Release and other indices, the number of fish counters in use is considered sufficient as a component within the array of methodologies available to the SSC. However, the requirement for additional counters is continually reviewed.

Mobile Telephony Services

1139. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a low-cost option for persons telephoning Government Departments and offices from mobile phone networks could be instituted by his Department, in view of the fact that mobile phone ownership is far more extensive than landlines, including among the poorest sections of society. [13291/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The matter raised in the Question is a customer service issue for each individual public body including Government Departments. The use and display of telephone numbers is an area in which I have no statutory function. While I cannot compel public bodies including Government Departments and offices to use or display any particular telephone access codes in preference to alternative codes available, I would draw the Deputy's attention to arrangements in my Department which operates an 1890 lo-call option for users contacting my Department from fixed line numbers and a standard 01-6782000 access code which allows mobile phone users to contact my Department at the standard rate charged by their service provider or within their bundled minutes package. Other Government Departments offering a lo-call number also offer a standard phone number which can be accessed both from within and outside Ireland and which may be less expensive for mobile users to use.

Question No. 1140 answered with Question No. 1108.

Question No. 1141 answered with Question No. 66.

Geological Survey of Ireland

1142. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the counties in which his Department or its agencies have conducted groundwater mapping investigations; and if the data and information gathered is assisting other public agencies in protecting groundwater and drinking water supplies. [13691/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Geological Survey's Groundwater Programme has carried out a National Groundwater Protection Programme and Vulnerability Mapping on a county basis in conjunction with Local Authorities and other relevant agencies, which was completed in 2014. These maps are incorporated into County Development Plans. As part of this programme, specific Public Water Supply Protection Plans were produced with the respective Local Authorities.

The Geological Survey has also been working on specific drinking water supplies, focussed on Group Water Schemes since 2010, which are located throughout the country.

Since 2015, the Geological Survey has been supporting Irish Water in their Source Protection Work for Groundwater Public Supplies.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), an agency under the auspices of the Depart-

ment, is the competent authority for the delivery of the Water Framework Directive and have supervisory powers for Irish water supplies. All of the national maps produced by the Geological Survey are fundamental layers for the national characterisation process used by the EPA in support of the Water Framework Directives.

The nature of the programme as a national endeavour has resulted in work in all counties. Last year, work focussed on Donegal, Mayo, Cork, Tipperary and Roscommon.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

1143. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there will be any changes to the current criteria of the SEAI's better energy homeowner scheme which may cause an increase in the costs of the associated works for homeowners that avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14019/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes (BEH) Scheme, which along with the Communities and Warmer Homes schemes makes up the Better Energy Programme, provides grant aid to homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating systems upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER). In 2016 the Better Energy Programme spent €54m. Of that, €17m was spent in grant funding the Better Energy Homes Scheme which resulted in over 15,000 homeowners being supported to carry out energy efficiency works to their homes.

I have not made any changes to the criteria for the Better Energy Homes scheme in 2017. I have, however, increased the overall allocation to the Better Energy Programme for 2017 to €74m so that as many people as possible can make their home more energy efficient.

This year I have requested SEAI to review the measures that are currently supported through the scheme and the results of this review will inform any future measures that may be offered. Any expansion of measures would be to support deeper energy efficiency upgrades for those homeowners who wish to take this step.

Departmental Legal Costs

1144. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14128/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 1145 answered with Question No. 1128.

Bioenergy Strategy

1146. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the strategic environmental assessment of the draft National Bioenergy Plan, which was drafted in 2014 and has remained in draft form ever since, will be published and put to public consultation; the reason this information was not available before the recent consultation on a renewable heat incentive, which is one of the proposals in the draft plan; and the analysis which has been carried out of the sustainability of large scale importation of biofuels and solid biomass, which seems to be envisaged by the draft plan. [14172/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Draft Bioenergy Plan sets out the policy areas that must be coordinated to support the development of biomass sector in Ireland. It identifies 19 measures to support the sustainable development of the sector. There are a wide range of Government departments, agencies and state bodies that are critical enablers for bioenergy development by virtue of their responsibility for areas such as forestry, agriculture, waste, research funding and business development. My Department is still in the process of finalising the draft Environmental report and associated Natura Impact Statement in respect of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment for the Bioenergy Plan. I expect that these documents and a revised draft bioenergy plan to go for public consultation in quarter two this year. This consultation will be advertised on my Department's website a*t www.dccae.gov.ie* .

One key measure in the Draft Bioenergy Plan is the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). As the final design of the RHI was subject to public consultation, it was important to ascertain the views of the public before the SEA consultation on the draft Bioenergy Plan issued.

I am committed to ensuring that environmental sustainability is at the heart of the policies implemented by my Department, particularly given Ireland's objective of achieving a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. This will be reflected in the sustainability criteria applied in the final design of the RHI support scheme.

The recent consultation on the RHI recognised the importance of adopting a robust set of sustainability criteria, and raised the prospect of adopting the U.K. or E.U. standards for imported and domestic biomass used in the new scheme.

Though sustainability criteria exist for biofuels used in the transport sector as set out the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), currently there are no equivalent sustainability criteria for solid biomass such as wood chips and wood pellets. The European Commission has published recommended sustainability criteria for solid biomass in its Communication (COM (2010) 0011). However, to date, it has been left up to each Member State to include these requirements when introducing subsidies for bioenergy. Additionally, the European Commission has proposed to reinforce the current sustainability criteria to include solid biomass through the proposed LULUCF (Land use, land-use change and forestry) Regulation and the proposed recasting of the Renewable Energy Directive. Both of these proposals were published in the second half of 2016, and will be considered as part of the final design on the RHI.

Climate Change Policy

1147. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the roles he envisages in national climate policy for a number of provisions (details supplied); and his plans to redirect the resources currently being used to support peat fired electricity to achieve a just transition for sustainable employment in the Midlands. [14173/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naugh-

ten): The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, which is underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, provides the high-level policy direction for the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. The development of sectoral mitigation measures for the electricity generation, the built environment, transport and agriculture sectors to be set out in a National Mitigation Plan (NMP) is well advanced. The primary objective of the first NMP will be to monitor measures already underway and identify potential additional measures that, in the medium to longer term, will reduce GHG emissions. This will assist Ireland to achieve our national transition objective to become a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of 2050. Following a public consultation launched last week, the NMP will be submitted to Government for approval in June. The overarching objective of the Energy White Paper, published in December 2015, is to transition to a low carbon energy system which provides secure supplies of competitive and affordable energy to citizens and businesses. This will involve moving away from higher emissions fuel types to lower emissions fuels such as gas, or zero carbon renewable energy technologies. PSO support for Bord na Móna's Edenderry peat-fired station expired in December 2015. The Edenderry power station is now in receipt of support for biomass co-firing via REFIT3 for up to 30% the size of the plant. In addition, Bord na Móna has stated that it intends to cease harvesting peat for electricity generation by 2030. The company has committed to replace large-scale peat production with alternative indigenous energy sources such as biomass. In keeping with the Energy White Paper, this will contribute to the decarbonisation of electricity while also maintaining sustainable levels of quality employment in the Midlands.

Under the Better Energy Communities (BEC) scheme which is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, renewable energy heating systems are supported. Heat pumps and biomass boilers are being grant funded this year at up to 50% (or up to 95% for fuel poor households) when carried out with a combined fabric upgrade.

Climate Change Policy

1148. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on current plans to progress a low carbon economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14177/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the replies to Question Nos. 34 and 41 on today's Order Paper. In line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015, I am required to prepare and submit a National Mitigation Plan to Government for approval no later than 10 June this year. This will be the first in a series of successive National Mitigation Plans which will set out, on an ongoing basis, Ireland's strategy to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of 2050. The first National Mitigation Plan is being prepared on the basis that it will be a whole-of-Government plan, reflecting in particular the central roles of key Ministers responsible for the sectors covered by the Plan - Electricity Generation, the Built Environment, Transport and Agriculture, Forest and Land Use.

An important milestone in this work, and one required under the legislation, was reached last week when I published a draft National Mitigation Plan for public consultation. This consultation will help inform further work in my own Department and across Government to finalise the Plan later this year.

The consultation is an essential part of the process of public and stakeholder engagement on the challenges we face to meet our existing commitments and to begin the longer-term low carbon transition process to 2050. In addition to this consultation process, I recognise the need

to engage wider society more generally with the climate challenge, motivate changes in behaviour, and create structures at local, regional and national levels to support the generation of ideas and their translation into appropriate cost-effective actions. To progress this, I recently announced details of a National Dialogue on Climate Action.

It is important to note that the first National Mitigation Plan represents an initial step to set us on a pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required by 2050. It does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the 2050 objective, but rather is a work in progress reflecting the reality of where we are in our decarbonisation transition. When finalised, the Plan will become a living document, accessible on my Department's website, which is continually updated as ongoing analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. In addition, there will be the formal preparation of successive National Mitigation Plans at least once every five years as provided for in the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act.

EU Directives

1149. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the Environmental Protection Agency has plans to act upon calls from interested stakeholders regarding reducing supermarket packaging; and his views on whether this is an area in which Ireland could be a leader, similar to the plastic bag levy. [14179/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister, I am responsible for the administration of the EU Packaging Directive, which is transposed in Ireland by the European Union (Packaging) Regulations 2014. Under the Regulations, at least 60% of packaging waste must be recovered and 55% must be recycled. The most recent Waste Packaging Statistics for Ireland, published by the EPA in May 2016, show that Ireland has met and exceeded the overall packaging waste recovery rate and the recycling rate targets since they came into force.

Repak is the approved producer responsibility compliance scheme for packaging in Ireland and it is tasked with meeting recovery and recycling targets established under the EU Packaging Directive. Repak members pay fees based on the amount of packaging they place on the market and this incentivises them to reduce packaging.

A lot of work has been done by Repak members to prevent and minimise the amount of packaging they require. With the assistance of the EPA, Repak's Prevent and Save initiative funded under the National Waste Prevention Programme, has worked with Irish business to reduce packaging and to promote packaging improvements across industry. Under the initiative, specialist packaging technologists look for ways to optimise the packaging used and to minimise any resulting packaging waste. Further information can be found on *www.repak.ie/preventandsave* . However, it should also be noted that packaging is used by producers and retailers to protect and preserve goods and can help in preventing food and other product waste.

Water Pollution

1150. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the health risks of spreading dog faeces on fields (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14181/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): The land-spreading of manures is controlled by the European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2014, as amended. The objective of the Regulations is to protect ground and surface waters, including drinking water sources, primarily through the management of livestock manures and other fertilisers. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government are the lead Department for these regulations and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has no function.

Climate Change Policy

1151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures being taken to offset the effects of climate change with particular reference to the encouragement of the use of non fossil fuels in the domestic heating sector, road transport and agriculture; the extent to which the use of reliable alternatives are being encouraged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14266/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the replies to Question Nos. 34 and 41 on today's Order Paper. In line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015, I am required to prepare and submit a National Mitigation Plan to Government for approval no later than 10 June this year. This will be the first in a series of successive National Mitigation Plans which will set out, on an ongoing basis, Ireland's strategy to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of 2050. The first National Mitigation Plan is being prepared on the basis that it will be a whole-of-Government plan, reflecting in particular,the central roles of key Ministers responsible for the sectors covered by the Plan - Electricity Generation, the Built Environment, Transport and Agriculture, Forest and Land Use. As required under the 2015 Act, each Minister with responsibility for these sectors has been requested by Government to develop the sectoral mitigation measures that he/she proposes to adopt.

An important milestone in this work, and one required under the legislation, was reached last week when I published a draft of National Mitigation Plan for public consultation. This consultation will help inform further work in my own Department and across Government to finalise the Plan later this year. The consultation is an essential part of the process of public and stakeholder engagement on the challenges we face to meet our existing commitments and to begin the longer-term process of low carbon transition by 2050.

The draft National Mitigation Plan sets out the opportunities and challenges for each of the key sectors in addition to specifying a range of mitigating options in place and under consideration. Measures already in place include the Renewable Energy Feed-in-Tariff Schemes, Biofuels Obligation Scheme, Low Emission Vehicle incentivisation and National Policy on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport. The range of mitigating measures currently under consideration includes the development of a new support scheme for renewable electricity, a renewable heat incentive, increased penetration of renewable energy in the transport energy mix and further incentivisation of low emission vehicles. An opportunity for the Agriculture, Forest and Land Use sector to contribute to renewable energy was also identified and this includes biofuels being potentially produced from agricultural waste and for forest-based biomass and residues to be used to produce heat and/or power through combustion or anaerobic digestion. The draft Plan also highlights the need to prepare options for the removal of fossil fuel subsidies as a key cross-cutting action.

It is important to note that the first National Mitigation Plan represents an initial step to set us on a pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required by 2050. It does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the 2050 objective, but rather is a work in progress reflecting the

reality of where we are in our decarbonisation transition. When finalised, the Plan will become a living document, accessible on my Department's website, which is continually updated as ongoing analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. In addition, there will be the formal preparation of successive National Mitigation Plans at least once every five years as provided for in the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act.

Departmental Priorities

1152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his priorities under the headings of communications, climate action and the environment; the extent to which targets are being met; his plans for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14267/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The mission of my Department, as set out in our Statement of Strategy 2016 -2019, is to support economic and social progress and help the country reach its full potential by:

- facilitating the development of communications and energy infrastructure and markets;
- leading the national transition to a sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient economy;
- protecting and improving our high-quality natural environment;
- ensuring the sustainable and productive use of our natural resources; and
- promoting the development of the public and private broadcasting sectors.

The Statement of Strategy is published on my Department's website at the following link *www.dccae.gov.ie/SiteCollectionDocuments/About-Us/Statement%20of%20Strategy%202016-2019.pdf.*

The objectives set out in the Statement of Strategy across the various sectors for which the Department is responsible, together with the Programme for Government and EU obligations, guide and inform the departmental priorities for each year. Priorities for 2017 include delivery of the National Broadband Plan, publishing the first National Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Plans, publication of a National Clean Air Strategy and the introduction a new Renewable Heat Incentive and Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.

My Department is required to prepare an annual report on progress on its priorities. The most recent annual report for 2015 is also available on my Departments website at the following link *www.dccae.gov.ie/news-and-media/Lists/Publications%20Documents/Annual%20Report%202015/DCENR%20Annual%20Report%202015.pdf.*

Mobile Telephony Services

1153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which improvements have taken place in the quality of mobile telephone service with particular reference to areas in which complaints have been made continuously over the last number of years; if the relevant service providers have been approached by the regulator or his Department with a view to a dramatic improvement in the standard, quality and availability of service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14268/17]

1157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress in the provision of adequate mobile telephone service and broadband throughout the country with a view to ensuring that all areas have access to the highest quality service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14273/17]

1158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which complaints continue to be made to the regulator in respect of poor quality mobile telephone service; the action taken as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14274/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1153, 1157 and 1158 together.

The provision of telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the service providers concerned who operate in a fully liberalised market regulated by the independent Regulator of the telecommunications sector, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). In that regard, the management of radio spectrum is a statutory function of ComReg. I understand that licences issued by ComReg impose terms and conditions on mobile network operators which include minimum population coverage obligations, and that ComReg monitors compliance in this regard by means of biannual drive tests. However, given ComReg's independence, I have no statutory function in the matter of mobile phone coverage.

I am, however, critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Any customer who experiences service difficulties should raise the matter with the service provider in the first instance. If this fails to resolve matters, customers can and should refer a complaint to ComReg, which will investigate the service provider's compliance with its contractual obligations.

I do not have a statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services to particular locations. However, mobile operators have invested significantly in rolling out improved services, following ComReg's multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage. However, as mobile services are a radio based technology, services can be affected by topography, quality of handsets and the capacity of the network, as well as by and proximity to mobile telephone antennas. The rate of demand for data services has increased by 500% in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for mobile operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and internationally.Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force. In July 2016, I established the Task Force together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available on both Departments' websites. In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In order to maintain momentum, I, together with my colleague Minister Humphreys, have established an Implementation Group, which met for the first time on 8 March. This group will drive and monitor the implementation of the actions in the Task Force report, bringing together

all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery of actions. This group will formally report every 90 days on progress made on all actions to both myself and Minister Humphreys. I am expecting the first such quarterly report in April, following the end of this quarter.

In addition, I have signed regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 allocation of spectrum in the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances. These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Broadband Service Provision

1154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress in relation to the provision of high quality and high speed broadband in all areas throughout the country with particular reference to facilitating the increasing number of persons working from their homes and as a result eliminating road traffic congestion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14269/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband to all businesses and households in Ireland through policy and regulatory measures by acting as a catalyst to commercial investment and by State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. Since the publication of the NBP, investment by the commercial telecommunications sector has been considerable with over €2.5bn spent in upgrading and modernising networks. As a result, today, approximately 1.4m (61%) of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. Significant growth is anticipated over the next 2 years.

The latest ComReg quarterly report highlights that over 65% of all broadband customers now avail of high speed broadband services (> 30 Megabits per second).

My Department is running a procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area.

My Department has also been actively monitoring commercial plans. As a result, the High Speed Broadband Map will be updated in the coming weeks 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 finalisation of the Intervention Area is a key step in the procurement process and will help bidders prepare for the next phase. The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered during the procurement process. During stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP.

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 and a prioritisation programme will be put in place in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Two Regional Action Groups have been established to work with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate broadband rollout in rural Ireland.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce has moved to the Implementation phase. The Implementation Programme on Mobile Phone and Broadband Access identifies 19 of the 40 Taskforce actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Government Departments and State Agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. Each of the actions and Implementation Programme has its own timeframe for delivery, see Report: *www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx.*

These initiatives will assist in facilitating people working from home as well as helping to stimulate the economy, growth of jobs and new enterprise and to revitalise rural development.

Waste Management

1155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the guidelines or regulations appertaining to the dumping of various forms of waste at landfill facilities throughout the country; the way a threat to the environment is determined in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14270/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Licensing) Regulations 2004 govern the process under which waste licences are applied for and maintained. Once granted, each waste licence defines the nature of environmentally acceptable activities that can take place at a waste facility, including the acceptable types of waste that can be received. This is done by the conditions of the licence which are set by the Environmental Protection Agency. I have no function in relation either to the setting of operating conditions or their enforcement and under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996 , as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the Environmental Protection Agency, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

Quarrying Sector

1156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which procedures to restore disused or exhausted quarries are in force having particular regard to the need to ensure public safety, the reduction of pollution threat and the need to protect the environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14271/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Under the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999, my Department is responsible for the regulation of mineral exploration and mining. My Department has no function in respect of regulating the quarrying of stone, sand, gravel or clay, with this falling to be dealt with by local authorities.

Questions Nos. 1157 and 1158 answered with Question No. 1153.

Climate Change Policy

1159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date in the meeting of international targets and agreements on carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14275/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 34, 41 and 71 on today's Order Paper. Under the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision No. 406/2009/EC, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. The latest available greenhouse gas emissions projections for the period to 2020, published by the Environmental Protection Agency in March 2016, indicate that Ireland's emissions in 2020 could be in the range of 6 □ 11% below 2005 levels, depending on whether additional policies or measures, beyond those already in place by the end of 2014, are implemented.

I published the draft National Mitigation Plan for public consultation on 15 March. I intend that this public consultation will help inform further work in my own Department and across Government to finalise the Plan in the middle of this year. When finalised, this Plan will provide the framework for continued work towards meeting our 2020 targets. I t is important to note that the first National Mitigation Plan also represents an initial step to set us on a pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required by 2050. The Plan will become a living document, accessible on my Department's website, and will be continually updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. In addition, there will be the formal preparation of successive National Mitigation Plans at least once every five years as provided for in the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act.

This process will also drive the implementation of measures required to meet Ireland's expected emissions reduction targets between 2021 to 2030 under the proposed EU Effort Sharing Regulation for the sectors of the economy not included in the EU Emissions Trading System. The proposed Effort Sharing Regulation, in turn, represents the European Union's approach to meeting its commitment under the Paris Agreement to a reduction of at least 40% in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. This commitment is to be met through reductions of 43% in the Emissions Trading System and 30% in the rest of the economy compared with 2005 levels.

The Effort Sharing Regulation proposal continues to be negotiated at EU level between EU Member States and the European Parliament.

Environmental Protection Enforcement

1160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which he remains satisfied that adequate measures continue to be taken to ensure environmental protection with particular reference to pollution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14276/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Rigorous implementation of environmental policy and legislation, underpinned by the principle of proportionality, is the appropriate approach to adopt in protecting our environment.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the independent statutory body responsible for protecting the environment in Ireland. The EPA performs a wide range of statutory functions in fulfilment of its mandate. For example, the EPA has a key role in licensing facilities with the potential for significant environmental pollution, to ensure that their emissions do not endanger human health or harm the environment. The EPA is responsible for issuing Industrial Emission Directive Licenses; Integrated Pollution and Control (IPC) Licenses; Waste Licences; Waste Water Discharge Authorisations; Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Authorisations; and Radiological Protection Licences.

The EPA also encourages participation in its regulatory activities, through providing input to its decision making processes and reporting any negative environmental impacts from facilities that it licences such as odours, noise or water pollution. Currently there are approximately 800 industrial and waste facilities operating under EPA Licences.

While overall compliance with EPA Licences is good, the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement introduced a new methodology in 2015 for risk-ranking National Priority Sites which takes account of enforcement performance, giving a timely, dynamic and accurate picture of where regulatory responses should be directed.

It is recognised by the EPA that many pollution problems such as air quality, water pollution, odours and noise tend to be localised and can be masked by national level assessments. These localised problems can have severe impacts on the health and well-being of the people in individual communities and on the quality of the local environment. Making the link between environment and health is, therefore, of critical importance in both understanding and dealing with these problems. Targeting actions in the right places is also of critical importance to the EPA in addressing the problems in both an effective and efficient manner, and they are placing a particular focus on any licensed industrial, waste and waste water facilities creating nuisance for adjacent communities.

EPA prosecutions are particularly focussed on priority sites and issues. In 2016, the EPA conducted over 1,500 site visits at licensed facilities and 17 prosecutions were pursued.

The EPA operates in a transparent and open manner, publishing comprehensive details about its activities. Further information is available to the public on *www.epa.ie.*

I have secured an additional €2m for the EPA in my Department's estimates for 2017 to, *inter alia,* support its enforcement activities.

Air Pollution

1161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the levels of air pollution continue to be monitored; if the results are in keeping with best practice and international requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14277/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out in accordance with the requirements of 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 Qual-

ity 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. 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.

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 significantly 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 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.

Ministerial Allowances

1162. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14563/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): No Minister or Minister of State in my Department has claimed overnight expenses since 2011 for staying in Dublin.

Bus Éireann

1163. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has consulted the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform regarding potential proposals to provide financial assistance to Bus Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12786/17]

1171. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if proposals to provide financial assistance to Bus Éireann have been provided to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; if he has consulted the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12785/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1163 and 1171 together.

The Deputy is aware that Bus Éireann receives extensive financial support each year from the Exchequer in relation to the PSO bus services it provides under contract with the National Transport Authority and the school transport services provided under an administrative agreement with the Minister for Education and Skills. Additionally the Company also receives fund-

ing, through its parent company CIÉ, from the Department of Social Protection in relation to the Free Travel Scheme.

Except for those long established supports described above, no proposals have been made to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to providing financial assistance nor have I consulted the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on any such proposals.

Rail Services Provision

1164. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the decision to include the revised metro north project in the Government's Capital Investment Plan 2016 to 2021 is not fully consistent with the public spending code guidelines on project appraisal (details supplied). [12961/17]

1179. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether one of the critical assumptions of lower passenger demand adopted in the Fingal north Dublin transport study (details supplied) still stands up to scrutiny, in view of the higher levels of projected employment and population growth and subsequently passenger demand than when the study was undertaken; and his further views on whether the redundancy of this lower demand assumption could mean that the decision to include the optimised project rather than the original project in the capital investment plan is misguided. [12958/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1164 and 1179 together.

The Fingal/North Dublin Study undertaken by the National Transport Authority and completed in 2015 represented a comprehensive analysis to identify the optimum long-term public transport solution to connect Dublin City Centre, Dublin Airport and Swords. Twenty five potential schemes were assessed, following which the new Metro North project was selected as the optimum scheme.

That study represented a comparative evaluation, comparing the various options on an equivalent basis. It used the best available population and employment information as part of the analysis work, incorporating detailed output from Census 2011, which was the most recent census at the time.

The analysis undertaken in 2015 demonstrated that a lower cost scheme than the original Metro North project was available, which would deliver an appropriately sized metro solution to serve the public transport needs along this corridor. That continues to be the case and work is proceeding on the detailed development of the New Metro North scheme.

It is noted that the Central Statistics Office have produced preliminary results from the 2016 census which align with the population growth projections used in the study. In addition and in relation to increased employment potential, the Fingal/North Dublin Study identified that the new Metro North scheme "*has significant capacity to allow for potential future growth*".

The design and planning work being undertaken at present on the new Metro North project, will continue to use the most up-to-date information available on population and employment projections to ensure that the final design and service pattern is correctly calibrated to fully meet the public transport needs of the corridor.

The decision to include the new Metro North project in the Capital Plan is fully consistent with the requirements of the Public Spending Code. When planning for expenditure over a

period of seven years, it will not always be possible to have detailed appraisals of projects in advance and their inclusion in the Capital Plan on the basis of a preliminary appraisal is not inconsistent with the Code. A decision to proceed with the project will still require a detailed business case.

Aviation Issues

1165. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has waived all traffic costs on military flights; if so, when this decision was made; and the cost to the Exchequer as a result of this decision. [13043/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The practice of exempting en-route charges for certain specified classes of airspace users, including military aircraft, derives from the exclusion of State aircraft from the scope of the 1944 Chicago Convention establishing the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). While the application of the exemption from charges is at the discretion of the State concerned, the policy and general practice at international level is to exempt such flights from charges.

The current exemption arrangements stem from Ireland's membership of Eurocontrol, a European intergovernmental organisation established in 1960 for the safety of Air Navigation. In common with most of Eurocontrol's 41 Member States, Ireland exempts military flights of Member States of Eurocontrol, the United States and Canada from payment of en route air navigation charges. This arrangement has applied since Ireland joined the Eurocontrol en route charging scheme in the 1970s.

The cost incurred by the Irish Aviation Authority in providing exempt en-route services for such flights is reimbursed by my Department/Exchequer. The total amount paid to the Irish Aviation Authority in 2016 in respect of exempt services was €2.6 million.

The exemption applies to charges for communications and navigation but does not cover terminal charges such as landing fees; consequently no reimbursement occurs for landing charges.

Road Tolls

1166. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of removing slip road tolls upon entry and exit to towns across the State. [13074/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are 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 powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority under Part V of 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 matter to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1167. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has studied the proposed plans in Norway and the Netherlands to ban conventional vehicle sales in 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13975/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland faces a significant challenge to meet its international greenhouse gas reduction commitments. Currently, Ireland's transport demand and emissions are increasing, with approximately three quarters of all journeys made by private cars accounting for over 55% of our transport emissions.

Over the coming years, we will need to continue to increase public transport capacity so as to help absorb the increased travel demand. In addition to this, a transition to alternatively-fuelled vehicles generally will be required to effect a substantial reduction in Ireland's overall transport emissions.

In that context, the Government is committed to exploring mechanisms to encourage earlier take up of electric vehicles. My Department, together with the Department for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an Interdepartmental Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) Task Force to consider the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon technologies, especially EVs, in line with the "Programme for a Partnership Government" commitment.

Furthermore, and reflecting the role of refuelling infrastructure in securing the transition to a low carbon economy, my Department recently developed a draft National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland - 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.

My Department and I are aware of the movement in other jurisdictions to ban the sales of conventionally fuelled vehicles from 2030 or, in some cases, 2025. We are also ambitious that all new cars sold into Ireland post 2030 will be zero emissions or zero emissions capable.

Airport Development Projects

1168. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has analysed the recent decision of the Austrian Federal Administrative Court in relation to a proposed third runway at Vienna airport (details supplied); and, if so, his views on the implications of this decision for the proposed third runway at Dublin Airport, in view of the obligations in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and Paris Agreement. [14174/17]

1240. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has analysed the recent decision of the Austrian Federal Administrative Court in relation to a proposed third runway at Vienna airport (details supplied); and if so, his views on the implications of this decision for the proposed third runway at Dublin Airport, in view of the obligations in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and the Paris Agreement. [14159/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1168 and 1240 together.

Planning permission for a second parallel runway at Dublin Airport was granted by an Bord

Pleanála in 2007. Last year, daa announced their plans to proceed with the North Runway project. Construction began in December 2016 with the runway due to become operational in 2020.

I have welcomed the decision taken by daa to proceed with this nationally important strategic infrastructure project, particularly given the importance of our connections to the rest of the world.

The runway development was subject to a rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as part of the full planning process in 2007. At that time the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) stated that the impacts of the runway on carbon emissions would not be significant and that mitigation measures such as improved aircraft engine efficiency, efficient airport operations and international climate agreements would address aviation carbon emissions.

The 2020 national reduction targets (under EU Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC) do not include international aircraft emissions so the North Runway project will have no direct impact on these targets.

International aviation emissions are to be addressed separately under an agreement reached in 2016 at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which involves the establishment of a Global Market-Based Measure (GMBM) to offset aviation's CO2 emissions from 2021 onwards by corresponding credits from environmentally beneficial projects.

While I am aware of the recent decision by the Austrian Federal Administrative Court (acting as the court of appeal) to revoke approval of construction of a third runway at Vienna Airport, this is a matter for Austria. I understand that an appeal against this decision is being pursued in the Austrian Supreme Administrative Court.

The development of the much needed additional runway capacity at Dublin Airport is a completely separate matter and one of huge importance to Ireland, particularly given our island status, unlike Austria which has many options in terms of its accessibility links with other countries.

Electric Vehicles

1169. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has proposed amending legislation to allow electric cars utilise preferential public parking and pay reduced parking fees on public metering in towns and cities, for example, in order to promote environmentally friendly modes of transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14178/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Road Traffic Act, 1994 gives local authorities the power to make bye-laws governing the type of paid parking controls in their areas. Some local authorities currently allow free designated parking for a period of time while a plug-in electric vehicle is charging. It is a matter for each individual authority to consider how to treat fees on public metering along with charges in relation to parking in designated charging bays.

I am, of course, committed to exploring mechanisms to encourage increased take up of electric vehicles. My Department, together with the Department for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have convened an Interdepartmental Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) Task Force to consider the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon technologies, especially EVs, in line with the "Programme for a Partnership Government" commitment.

The LEV Task Force has begun its work and it will review the full suite of possible measures to encourage increased take up of LEVs. The role of public parking and parking charges will be considered in this context. The Task Force also intends to provide an opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to contribute to the issues considered. Information about progress being made by the Taskforce will be available on my Department's website.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1170. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if possible restrictions to diesel fuel motor vehicles could come into effect here, as seen in continental Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14180/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland faces a significant challenge to meet our international greenhouse gas reduction commitments; at present, three quarters of all journeys are made by private car, accounting for over 55% of our transport emissions, and the demand for transport is growing. I am committed to meeting as much of this growing demand as possible through increasing public transport capacity and supply; encouraging modal shift towards more sustainable and active travel modes; and promoting the deployment and uptake of new technologies and alternative fuels.

Technology will undoubtedly offer one of the most efficient and cost effective pathways to achieving our mitigation and air quality objectives. Advances in battery technology, fuel science, increasing market competition and lowering vehicle costs will accelerate uptake of low carbon alternatives. To ensure that Ireland is in a position to adapt quickly to this developing market my Department will shortly publish a National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure reflecting the role of refuelling infrastructure in securing this transition. In conjunction with the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment, we have convened a Low Emissions Vehicle Task Force to consider the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon technologies, especially EVs. Additionally, there is a range of complementary policies currently under development: the National Mitigation Plan, the National Clean Air Strategy and the National Planning Framework.

I am aware of moves by some other jurisdictions to ban the sales of conventionally fuelled vehicles from 2030 or, in some cases, 2025. We are also ambitious that all new cars sold into Ireland post 2030 will be zero emissions or zero emissions capable.

Question No. 1171 answered with Question No. 1163.

Railway Stations

1172. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if CIÉ accepted a €3 million facilitation fee in 2016 in order to grant consent to the assignment of a development agreement (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12815/17]

1173. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the proportion of rents and or capital receipts CIÉ has received since a development agreement (details supplied) was executed; if he is satisfied that it amounts to the agreed 17.5% that falls under the heading of additional rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12818/17]

1188. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development agreement Coras Iompar Éireann has entered into regarding Tara Street Station with a company (details supplied); the nature of the proposed development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13149/17]

1189. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount paid to CIÉ by way of licence fee on lands being developed under licence from CIÉ in the past 20 years per annum and by site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13151/17]

1192. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an agreement Coras Iompar Éireann entered into for a Spencer Dock site that expires in 2018 contains a clause allowing a further two-year extension, provided certain conditions are met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13163/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1172, 1173, 1188, 1189 and 1192 together.

The issues raised are matters for CIÉ and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Network

1174. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the M3 motorway was not constructed as far as Cavan town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12887/17]

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 (including the M3 road scheme) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Facilities Provision

1175. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or the National Transport Authority is providing funding to Dublin City Council for a cycle track as part of the S2S footway and cycleway interim works scheme at Clontarf, Dublin 3; the level of funding being provided; if difficulties have been notified to his Department in relation these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12890/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme, my Department provides funding to the NTA for the seven local authorities in the GDA for the implementation of sustainable transport projects including cycling/walking infrastructure, Quality Bus Corridors, safety, inte-

gration and traffic management projects throughout the region.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

1176. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide funding for local improvement schemes for rural roads in view of the fact that the Minister for State with responsibility for regional economic development has offered to contribute funding from the CLÁR programme for these roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12918/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) remains in place this year. This Scheme provides funding for private roads and laneways, the maintenance and improvement of which is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. While the LIS does not have a ring-fenced allocation in 2017, local authorities may use a proportion of State grant funding (15% of the Discretionary Grant which is €510,589 in the case of Kerry County Council) for LIS should they wish to do so. In addition Councils can also provide monies from their own resources towards LIS if they wish to do so. All available grant funding for this year has been allocated.

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

Road Projects Status

1177. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed M4 from Mullingar to Longford and onto Sligo due to the significant need and demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12923/17]

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 national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Rail Network Expansion

1178. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding that has been allocated to progress the metro north project since the publication of the capital plan. [12957/17]

1197. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of the metro north from Dublin city centre to Swords-Lissenhall, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13252/17]

1221. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13630/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1178, 1197 and 1221 together.

Funding of over €700 million has been allocated under the Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 for planning, design and construction of new Metro North. Funding in the initial years of the Capital Plan is for planning and design work with construction expected to commence in 2021 with a view to delivering the project by 2026/2027. It is estimated that the project will cost in the region of €2.4 billion (excluding VAT). The Programme for Partnership Government commits to proceeding with the New Metro North project.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the new Metro North project.

The decision to proceed with new Metro North followed consideration of the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study and the NTA's recommendations on the study, which identified the light-rail link as the optimum long term public transport solution on the Swords/airport/city centre corridor. It is expected that the service will offer capacity for 9,900 passengers per hour per direction with the potential to expand services in the future if demand requires.

The NTA, in collaboration with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), is undertaking an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations. Arising from this work a final route and station configuration will be established. It is my understanding that the NTA and TII anticipate that this process will be complete by the end of 2017, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken in 2018.

Question No. 1179 answered with Question No. 1164.

Road Safety

1180. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will arrange a review of safety issues in a location on a national primary route (details supplied) with a view to improving safety in this location for motorists. [13007/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand that the junction the Deputy is referring to at Mallow General Hospital is located on the N20, rather than the N21 national road. 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 (including the N20) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Regarding the location of the bus stop, in accordance with Section 16 of the Road Traffic Act 2002, road authorities (that is, local authorities) are responsible for determining stopping places for buses on public roads. Accordingly, concerns about the location or position of the

bus stop concerned are a matter for the road authority in the first instance.

As the junction referred to by the Deputy is located on a national route, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expedite the scheduling of a driving test for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13010/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no power to intervene in individual cases. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within 10 days.

Swimming Pool Programme Status

1182. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of funding for the Lucan swimming pool project; if draft architectural plans have been received and a final timescale given for the delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13017/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) provides grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. There are four stages in the development of a project under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, namely Preliminary Report, Contract Documents, Tender and Construction.

In January of 2016, my Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations. There were three expressions of interest received for new pools, two of which were valid and both in Dublin. Having assessed existing commitments and the funding available, it was was decided to include the proposal from South Dublin County Council (SDCC) for a new swimming pool in Lucan in the LASPP.

My Department wrote to SDCC in April 2016 advising the Council to undertake the Preliminary Report stage (which includes the Feasibility Study, Appointment of Consultants for Preliminary Proposals and Design Brief). Documentation in this regard was received from SDCC in July 2016. Following examination by my Department's technical advisor and my officials, SDCC was given approval in October 2016 to appoint the recommended design team and proceed to the design brief. SDCC was also asked to provide outstanding material relating to the feasibility study and the site location map. A reminder in this regard was issued to SDCC in January 2017. No draft architectural plans have yet been received as designing such plans normally takes a number of months. I understand from SDCC however, that work is ongoing in relation to these plans. Once the required documentation is received from the Council, there will be no undue delay in terms of my Department assessing the material in order to move to the next stage of the process.

Public Transport Provision

1183. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Government policy regarding the provision of public transport infrastructure along existing transport corridors designated as strategic for the development of future housing (details supplied), in order that these lands can be sustainably developed and public transport solutions put in place alongside the first housing provision; if this policy has been clearly communicated to the semi-autonomous agencies and State companies charged with ensuring the deliverability of such a network; if these agencies will provide a timeline for same as part of any public consultation process for such developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13018/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

The statutory objective of the NTA's *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 - 2035*is to provide a long-term strategic planning framework for the integrated development of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA. The development of the Strategy was informed by a full public consultation and is required by legislation to have regard to national, regional and local planning policies for the GDA. The NTA is currently in the process of preparing an Implementation Plan for the delivery of the strategy for the period 2017-2022.

I am aware that the NTA is working closely with South Dublin County Council in the preparation of the transport proposals to be included in the draft planning scheme for the Strategic Development Zone referred to by the Deputy.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Facilities Provision

1184. **Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to calls for a nationwide audit of sports facilities and the benefits of providing same in terms of more efficient use of resources and targeting of facilities in areas of real demand; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that some local authorities have already made efforts to obtain such information in their own areas; if such information could be obtained and made publicly available in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13019/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I am aware of views expressed regarding the need for, and benefits of, a nationwide audit of sports facilities as this issue, along with the need for a more efficient use of resources and facility allocation generally, was raised in a number of submissions received during the National Sports Policy Consultation Process, which was launched in November last. Over 50 submissions have been received during this consultation process, including a number from the Local Sports Partnership Network. My officials are currently examining all of these submissions. It is expected that the new National Sports Policy Framework will be published in mid-2017. The matter of a nationwide audit of sports facilities is being considered in that context. I should also highlight the 'Get Ireland Active' database operated by the HSE and available online, which contains important and useful information on places to get active around Ireland, including sports facilities.

Roads Maintenance

1185. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1518 to 1520, inclusive, of 17 January 2017, which confirm the mandatory use of the design manual for urban roads and streets, DMURS, the reason Sligo County Council does not adhere to DMURS for roads in urban areas with speed limits of 60 km/h or less in relation to the removal of parking bollard obstructions to previously derelict residential properties (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13106/17]

1186. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1518 to 1520, inclusive, of 17 January 2017, if he will expedite the removal of parking bollard obstructions to previously derelict residential properties on a road (details supplied) in Sligo town which comply with the design manual for urban roads and streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13107/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1185 and 1186 together.

Section 1.3 of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) deals with the application of the Manual. Essentially, it must be used in urban areas when constructing new roads or retrofitting existing roads unless written consent is given by the appropriate sanctioning body allowing a departure from it. In this case, the appropriate sanctioning body would be my Department.

With reference to the specific issue raised by the Deputy, I can confirm that to date, my Department has not received a request from Sligo County Council seeking written consent to depart from DMURS.

However, it is important to note that the Manual does not purport to account for every scenario that a designer will encounter, particularly when retrofitting existing streets nor can the Manual cover every technical detail. Many matters are left to the professional expertise and judgement of users. The principles, approaches and standards set out in the Manual are intended for use by suitably qualified and experienced designers who work within the built environment profession.

Rail Accidents

1187. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide information on vehicular collision data to a bridge (details supplied) located in Sligo town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13108/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Questions Nos. 1188 and 1189 answered with Question No. 1172.

Road Projects Status

1190. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the money allocated to date for the construction of a road (details supplied); when further funding will be allocated for the next phase; when he envisages the project will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13152/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads within its area is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

Details of grant payments to end 2016 in respect of this project are available in the Regional and Local Roads Grant Payment booklets which are available from the Dáil library.

Before the main contract for the Coonagh to Knockalisheen project can commence, important advance works must be undertaken. These advance works include special ground works treatment along a section of the proposed road. An allocation of €2.5 million has been provided to Limerick City & County Council to progress these advance works in 2017. The timescale for completion of this phase of the project is a matter for Limerick City and County Council.

Airport Security

1191. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 308 of 1 March 2017, the conditions under which a business case for a preclearance facility at Cork Airport would become a realistic possibility. [13161/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The recently announced new routes to the US from Cork Airport are at a very early stage and need some time to bed down before there will be clarity on passenger demand for these routes and their performance. In line with normal practice, any business case would entail an assessment of the likely benefits of preclearance at Cork Airport in comparison to the costs of introducing such a facility. This would be a matter for the daa in the first instance.

Question No. 1192 answered with Question No. 1172.

Driver Licences

1193. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to change the driver licence criteria for those over 70 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13204/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The driver licence rules for those over 70 are set in regulations for which I have responsibility. There are specific measures which come into effect in relation to driver licensing from the age of 70. These are, first, that driving licences are issued for three years rather than the usual ten, and, second, that specific medical and eye tests are required as part of the renewal process in order to ensure fitness to drive. Finally, those over 70 are not required to pay a fee for the renewal of their licence. The requirement for medical tests is based on medical evidence which shows that age-related deterioration can affect people's ability to drive. It is normal international practice to require such tests, and has been a legal requirement in this jurisdiction since 1964. I have no plans to change this requirement. Nor do I have any plans to remove the exemption from licence fees for the over-70s.

I understand that the Road Safety Authority, which has responsibility for driver licensing, is working on a number of proposals to put to me at some point during 2017 in relation to amending other aspects of the rules relating to older drivers. I will be happy to consider these proposals when I receive them.

Seirbhísí Iompair

1194. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Murphy** den Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt an tionscnamh 'Metro North' i ndiaidh a bheith bogtha chun tosaigh, an aontaíonn sé gur chóir ainm Gaeilge a thabhairt ar an tseirbhís iompair nua seo, mar a rinneadh leis an tseirbhís 'Luas' roinnt blianta ó shin [13221/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Cuireadh an moladh bunaidh le haghaidh nasc iarnróid éadrom go Sord trí Aerfort Bhaile Átha Cliath san áireamh faoin gclár infheistíochta iompair Transport 21agus tugadh Metro Northair. Dá bhrí sin, nuair a rinneadh an cinneadh i mí Mheán Fómhair 2015 chun dul ar aghaidh le leagan optamaithe an tionscadail nasc iarnróid éadrom tar éis thoradh an Staidéir Iompair Fhine Gall/North Dublin, tugadh new Metro Northar an tionscadal athbhreithnithe mar chaothúlacht agus chun idirdhealú a dhéanamh ar an moladh bunaidh. Is teideal oibre é seo ar an tionscadal agus ní chuireann sé bac ar theideal eile a roghnú ag pointe éigin sa todhchaí. Mar sin féin, níl pleananna agam faoi láthair é sin a dhéanamh.

Sports Organisations

1195. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attentions have been drawn to the comments made by a person (details supplied) on ladies football and camogie coming under the GAA umbrella; his views on such a measure; if he will propose this to the GAA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13239/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All National Governing Bodies of Sport, including the GAA, the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and the Camogie Association, are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own internal structure. Neither I nor my Department have any role in relation to these matters and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to intervene.

Sports Funding

1196. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is legislation in place to enforce sporting bodies to employ a certain number of women in senior positions or risk losing funding; if not, his plans to implement such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13240/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): While my colleague, the Minster for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is responsible for employment legislation and policy, and this is a matter in which I have no function, I am not aware of any legislation that requires any employer to employ people in accordance with the circumstances described by the Deputy. The soon to be published National Sports Policy, which is expected to be launched in mid-2017, will address a wide range of issues including that of gender diversity and equality, and the role of female leadership in sport. Any proposals

for legislation on this issue would be considered in that context.

Question No. 1197 answered with Question No. 1178.

Taxi Licences Renewals

1198. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will amend regulation 31 of the Taxi Regulation (Small Public Service Vehicles) Regulations 2015 for the age of SPSVs in order that the driver of a standard taxi that is nearing retirement can continue to use their vehicle which is over ten years old for a further period of time; the reason for this regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13264/17]

1201. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legal basis for licences not being granted to taxi drivers whose vehicles are over ten years old; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13275/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1198 and 1201 together.

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 both questions to the NTA for direct reply to the Deputies. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Roads Maintenance Funding

1199. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make the necessary funding available to carry out specific works (details supplied). [13266/17]

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 (including the N72 Fermoy to Mallow route) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Ministerial Meetings

1200. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will meet with a person (details supplied) in Waterford city the next time he visits the city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13269/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand from my Department officials that I have not received a meeting request from this person. Should the

person wish to send a meeting request to my Departmental office for my attention, I can assure the Deputy that it will be given due consideration.

Question No. 1201 answered with Question No. 1198.

Road Traffic Offences

1202. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address the growing problem of uninsured drivers on roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9545/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of uninsured drivers would appear to be rising, based on estimates submitted by the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland (MIBI), but the number of vehicles on our roads has also risen as the economy improves and the size of the fleet increases. The establishment of an Insured and Uninsured database by Insurance Ireland and MIBI, as provided for in the Road Traffic Act 2016 which was signed into law in December 2016, will ensure the provision of reliable data to an Garda Síochána to enable them to robustly enforce uninsured drivers and take them off our roads. The project to design and implement this database is well underway; officials from my Department, an Garda Síochána and the Department of Justice, together with the MIBI and Insurance Ireland, are overseeing the design and implementation of the database, and a test version is expected to be ready by mid 2017, with the project due for completion in 2018. The MIBI will have ownership of and responsibility for the database, which will be made available to this Department and an Garda Síochána. The Cost of Insurance Working Group, in which this Department plays an active role, is also overseeing other measures which should drive down the cost of motor insurance significantly, thus making insurance more affordable for drivers and reducing the risk of them deciding to drive uninsured for financial reasons. The report of the working group was submitted to Government and was published in mid January. The Working Group has commenced work on the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Road Signage

1203. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review a matter (details supplied) and bring it to the attention of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII; if he will request TII to improve the lack of signage and road markings at the dangerous junction on the N2 in Monaghan; if he will intervene in this matter in view of the fact that a number of serious and some fatal accidents have occurred here; if he will address the concerns of local persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13315/17]

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 (including the N2) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Bodies Board Remuneration

1204. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm that in line with the one-person one-salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13338/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In accordance with the One Person One Salary direction issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in late 2011, payment of Board Fees to public sector employees with a contractual obligation in place, with certain exceptions, can be paid but should be stopped at the earliest legally acceptable opportunity (normally on expiry of the appointment). The payment of board fees is a matter for the individual state agency. All state agencies under my Department's remit have been advised of the One Person One Salary principle. Details of board fee payments are available in the Annual Report and Accounts of the Agencies.

Roads Maintenance

1205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a junction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13340/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme, the construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Two similar questions (PQ 6699 & PQ 6799) were recently referred to TII for reply. TII's response, which outlines the role of road authorities, in this case Kerry County Council, in carrying out HD15 High Collision Location reports, has been forwarded to the Questions Office and is available to the Deputy.

Railway Stations

1206. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are train stations in south Kildare that are being considered to become unmanned stations. [13368/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Cycling Policy

1207. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has examined international practice, specifically the Dutch model, whereby the majority of children, before they start secondary school are required to pass a cycling test and whereby motorists are also trained for interaction with cyclists as part of their driver training when applying and testing for a driving licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13413/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2014 my Depart-

ment engaged Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard which would ensure a standardised level of cycle training around the country. The new standard, Cycle Right, launched in January 2017 will be rolled out this year to as many primary schools as funding allows. I am confident that this new cycle training, which is more in line with international best practice and includes an on-road element, will result, over time, in an increase in the number of children choosing to cycle to and from school. It is expected that 12,000 to 15,000 children will avail of the training in 2017. Cycling Ireland will administer and manage the Cycle Right scheme which is funded by my Department and the Road Safety Authority in addition to parental and local authority contributions.

Since 2011, learner drivers are required to take a 12-lesson programme of Essential Driver Training before taking the driving test. Among the topics which must be covered are potential risks associated with interacting with cyclists on the road.

Rail Services Provision

1208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount that was spent on the interconnector, DART underground project which did not proceed; the percentage of the project that can be reused in a scenario whereby a redesign is proceeded with; if redesign work is under way; if so, the stage at which it is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13499/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Exchequer spending to end 2014 on the DART Underground Tunnel (previously known as the DART interconnector) project amounted to €44.4 million, most of which related to design, planning and railway order costs. As the Deputy is aware, the Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned. The work and costs incurred to date in relation to the project will have value when the redesigned project proceeds.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has commenced work on the redesign of the tunnel in collaboration with Irish Rail and will progress this redesign work in line with available funding. Currently a study to re-examine tunnel size options is nearing completion and the NTA will shortly be commencing an assessment to determine the optimal connection location for the DART Underground Tunnel to tie-in to the Heuston Mainline. Other work is also ongoing in relation to tunnel variants.

Funding has been provided under the Government's current Capital Plan for work on the redesign of the tunnel and other elements of the DART Expansion Programme including for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan.

Departmental Schemes

1209. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps Fáilte Ireland and his Department took to ensure compliance with the terms of the grant scheme for large tourism projects 2016-2020 and relevant EU and Irish planning, state aid and competition law, in respect of the proposed funding of a tourism development project in the Dublin mountains at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13517/17]

1210. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps Fáilte Ireland is taking to ensure that any tourism development project in the Dublin

mountain area is fully compliant with all relevant planning and state aid rules and is also fully compliant with the relevant Irish and EU Law in regard to environmental impact assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13518/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1209 and 1210 together.

My Department's role in relation tin the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism offerings, it is not involved in the administration of its tourism capital programmes, which includes the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Rail Services Provision

1211. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide information on the project to extend the DART to Balbriggan, also serving the Skerries, Rush and Lusk and Donabate stations; the action taken in advancing this project thus far; the works which will be required to bring this project to completion; the timeframe for the necessary works at each stage and for the completion of the overall project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13534/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority's (NTA) 'Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035', which was approved and published in 2016, proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme which will provide DART services as far north as Drogheda, to Hazelhatch on the Kildare Line and to Maynooth in the west and to the M3 Parkway.

As required under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the NTA is now drawing up an integrated implementation plan to outline how they will go about delivering upon the Strategy's objectives for the period 2017-2022.

Funding for some elements of the DART Expansion Programme is included in the Government's Capital Plan including funding for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan on the Northern line.

The NTA in collaboration with Irish Rail has commenced work on the pre-planning stages of the DART Expansion Programme. A project team has been established and will develop a programme of work that can be delivered on an incremental basis in line with available funding.

Subject to availability of funding and approval of the detailed business case for the project, it is envisaged that the extension of the DART to Balbriggan would commence in 2020.

Public Transport Provision

1212. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he will take to improve transport services and connectivity to and from the city centre for

commuters, in view of capacity issues which exist at rush hour for rail transport serving the Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush and Lusk and Donabate stations and bus services connecting these communities to the city centre and in view of the often long journey times on a number of the bus services for these localities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13535/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and securing the provision of public transport services throughout the country including PSO bus services, rail services and light rail services. Iarnród Éireann is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the heavy rail network.

Noting the responsibilities of the agencies in this regard, I have forwarded your question to both the NTA and Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Ferry Services Expenditure

1213. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department can fund the Buncrana to Rathmullan and the Greencastle to Magilligan ferries in County Donegal to build on the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way. [13544/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department has no function in the provision or subsidisation of ferry services for these or any other routes.

My Department provides capital funding to Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, who administer and award capital grants to develop a wide range of tourism products, including the Wild Atlantic Way. However, the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects administered by Fáilte Ireland does not fund infrastructural projects such as car ferry services, which fall outside the scope of projects eligible for grant aid assistance under the scheme, when such services are not an integral part of a tourism activity, product or attraction.

Ministerial Meetings

1214. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with an organisation (details supplied) since assuming office; and if not, his plans to meet this organisation. [13563/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand from my Department officials that I have not received a meeting request from this body.

Should they wish to send a meeting request to my Departmental office for my attention, I can assure the Deputy that it will be given due and favourable consideration.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1215. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a club (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [13565/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I can confirm that an application has been submitted under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme in respect of the proposed development referred to by the Deputy.

All of the 2,320 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.

Local Authority Funding

1216. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of funding provided by his Department or agencies under its remit to individual local authorities for the provision of life saving equipment such as lifebuoys, defibrillators and safety signage in tabular form for each of the past six years; the funding sought by local authorities over the corresponding period; his plans in respect of this area of safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13576/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport does not have any role in relation to providing funding to local authorities for the provision of safety equipment.

Road Safety

1217. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expand on recent reports to introduce testing for tractors over four years of age with regard to road safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13604/17]

1232. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce NCT-MOT testing for tractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13917/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1217 and 1232 together.

Directive 2014/45/EU on the periodic roadworthiness testing of motor vehicles and their trailers, requires Member States, from May 2018, to introduce compulsory testing for tractors with a maximum design speed exceeding 40 km/h which are being used for commercial road haulage purposes. There is no requirement on Member States to introduce compulsory testing for such tractors used exclusively for agricultural purposes. There are no opt outs from the terms of this Directive.

My Department will be working with the Road Safety Authority to implement the aforementioned mandatory requirement in line with the May 2018 deadline, and it is anticipated that the Authority will be engaging with key stakeholder groups and issuing guidance in relation to the implementation of this Directive as soon as practically possible.

Swimming Pool Programme Funding

1218. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13623/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): In relation to Askeaton pool, I previously indicated that I would consider a request for funding from Limerick County Council to address some issues which arose at the complex as a result of flood damage. In this regard, officials from my Department met with Limerick County Council last month. At this meeting it was agreed that Limerick County Council would provide my Department with detailed plans and costings for the rectification of the issues at the pool. I understand that work is advancing in relation to these proposals and once received from the Council the matter will be fully considered.

Coast Guard Services

1219. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of personnel working for the Coast Guard indicating whether workers are volunteers, part time or full time. [13628/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Coast Guard, a Division of my Department, have 56 full-time staff assigned to their Division.

There are approximately 950 search and rescue volunteers who operate out of 43 Units nationwide. Following a competitive tender process on 22 July 2010 a contract agreement for search and rescue helicopters was signed between the Minister for Transport and CHC Ireland Ltd. These Helicopters respond to emergencies at sea, inland waterways, offshore islands and mountains. The helicopters are operated by CHC Ireland ltd and the fully qualified crews are employees of CHC Ireland ltd. The helicopter service contract commenced on 1 July 2012 for a period of 10 years.

Coast Guard Services

1220. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to put the Coast Guard on a legislative footing; when the heads of Bill can be expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13629/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On my own behalf and that of my Department, I would like again to express our deepest condolences and sincere sympathies to all those affected by the recent tragedy, particularly to the family members of the crew of Rescue 116 and also to thank all those individuals and organisations who have been so generous in giving their time and resources to support the search effort. The full resources of the State remain committed to ensure that every effort is being made to locate the wreckage of Rescue 116 and the three missing crew.

My Department and I have the utmost respect for the volunteers and helicopter crew who provide a search and rescue service on behalf of the Irish Coast Guard, a division of my Department. Their bravery, dedication and commitment is nothing short of remarkable.

As regards the question, it is true that the Irish Coast Guard is not a separately established legal entity. It is a division of my Department. It was established as such under a Government Decision in 1990, initially as the Irish Marine Emergency Service, the name was later changed

to the Irish Coast Guard in 2000, and the division was subsequently transferred from the Department of the Marine to the Department of Transport in 2006. Notwithstanding its functional location as a division of my Department it is in all operational respects a stand-alone primary response agency.

The IRCG have a number of functions, which include inter alia, Search and Rescue (SAR) and Maritime Pollution Prevention and Response. I am satisfied that the Irish Coast Guard has sufficient powers as a division of my Department, to carry out its functions. These powers are augmented by the various Merchant Shipping and Sea Pollution legislation which I have previously outlined in answer to a parliamentary question, on 15 November 2016 (Ref. 34648/16).

I am of the view, in light of the context set out above, that there is no need to place the IRCG on any additional statutory footing. Indeed, it is difficult to identify any specific need for legislation, or to establish what the purpose of any legislation would be. Legislating for a voluntary group would give rise to very complex matters and in all probability the volunteer sector would not be covered in any such legislation, as is evidenced by the Civil Defence Act which does not contain any provisions in respect of its large volunteer force. The same applies to matters such as training standards, which are dynamic and constantly evolving, and which are not, therefore an appropriate subject for legislation.

In these circumstances, I see no need to bring forward legislative proposals at this time.

Question No. 1221 answered with Question No. 1178.

Road Projects Expenditure

1222. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for a road junction (details supplied) in view of the fact there has been an increase in road traffic accidents in this area. [13639/17]

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

Arising from the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts the four Dublin Councils became self funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015. The provision of funding for the junction in question is, therefore, a matter for the local authority.

Road Projects Expenditure

1223. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of funding of a bypass (details supplied); the discussions he has held with the local authority involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13654/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Kildare is the statutory responsibility of Kildare County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council. My Department has not received an application for funding from Kildare County Council in respect of the Capdoo Bypass at Clane, Co. Kildare.

Given the cutbacks in State funding for regional and local roads since the financial crisis, it has been necessary to curtail the grant programme for major new regional and local road schemes and for major realignment schemes in order to protect the funding available for the maintenance of the existing network. The bulk of the funding allocated under the Capital Plan is, therefore, earmarked for the maintenance and renewal of the road network with some limited investment in the new projects. I announced the 2017 regional and local road allocations to local authorities (including Kildare County Council) on 24 January and all grant funding has now been allocated.

Bus Services

1224. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of increases in licences for routes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13657/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the licensing of Public Bus Passenger Services under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009.

As the issuing of licences for the routes in question is a matter for the NTA, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Coast Guard Services

1225. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that paramedics working with the Coast Guard shall be offered the opportunity to undergo further upskill training to advanced paramedic level or equivalent and to incorporate this training as part of the employees' professional development and, therefore, permitting them to administer life saving drugs, medicines and pain relief to persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13658/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following a competitive tender process on 22 July 2010 a contract agreement for search and rescue helicopters was signed between the then Minister for Transport and CHC Ireland Ltd. The helicopters are operated by CHC Ireland ltd and the fully qualified crews are employees of CHC Ireland Ltd and as such CHC Ireland Ltd and not my Department are responsible for the appropriate training, and qualifications of helicopter crew.

As part of its obligations under the Contract with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, CHC Ireland Ltd is registered with the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) as a recognised provider of Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG) training.

CHC Ireland Ltd commits to ensuring that each Paramedic and Emergency Medical Technician on its staff achieve CPG standards on a yearly basis. CHC must also appoint a medical Director to oversee the clinical practice of aircrew involved in treating casualties and a lead paramedic with a trainer qualification to ensure the on-the-job supervision of clinical practice

and in-service training.

Patient Transfers

1226. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will meet officials from the Department of Health to examine the possibility of ensuring that, irrespective of the person's location or the mission call out number, that in every instance whereby it is believed that transporting a person to hospital can be achieved faster via air than via road using an ambulance, then the closest helicopter to the person shall be deployed to respond to such emergency medical calls (details supplied); his views on the benefits which such a protocol may yield both in terms of improving patient outcomes and its potential to save lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13659/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following a competitive tender process on 22 July 2010 a contract agreement for search and rescue helicopters was signed between the Minister for Transport and CHC Ireland Ltd. These Helicopters respond to emergencies at sea, inland waterways, offshore islands and mountains. The helicopters are operated by CHC Ireland ltd and the fully qualified crews are employees of CHC Ireland ltd. The helicopter service contract commenced on 1 July 2012 for a period of 10 years.

The helicopters are made available by the Irish Coast Guard to provide a helicopter transfer service to the Health Service Executive National Ambulance Service. This service is currently available under a Service Level Agreement between my Department and HSE National Ambulance Service. This is an emergency service which includes the essential rapid transfer of patients between hospitals, the carriage to hospital of patients classed as life or death and the recovery of patients in remote access areas

While the Coast Guard helicopter's primary role is Search & Rescue, in normal circumstances the system has sufficient capacity and flexibility to allow for the deployment of the helicopter fleet to meet both the SAR & where requested by the HSE National Ambulance Service, Air Ambulance needs.

Officials from my Department have indicated to the Department of Health their availability to take part in the Department of Health's review of the adequacy of air transport coverage for patients.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

1227. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 711 of 31 January 2017, if he will publish the finalised scoring and weighting system for the allocation of funding under the 2017 sports capital programme with the precise details of the level of each weighting under each criteria heading. [13771/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The closing date for receipt of applications under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme was the 24 February and the Scoring System and Assessment Procedures was published on that day. A copy of this document can be downloaded from my Department's website at the following link:-

http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-scoring-system-and-assessment-procedures/assessment-manual-2017-scp.pdf

Rural Transport Services Provision

1228. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy he is pursuing or implementing relative to Bus Éireann and public transport services for rural Ireland; his plans to have a public transport system that gives connectivity throughout the country thus expanding rather than reducing the existing service; his views on the reduction of services through Castlecomer, County Kilkenny and the intention of Bus Éireann to close the services through south Kilkenny, at Thomastown and Callan; the cost to the State of the public service obligation, the school transport scheme and the free travel scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13832/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I must again be clear that the problems arising in Bus Éireann stem from its commercial Expressway routes which are actually a relatively small part of the overall public transport system in rural Ireland. The vast majority of public transport passenger journeys in rural Ireland are taken on PSO services which are funded by the Exchequer or on commercial bus services operated by a variety of private operators.

In relation to PSO services, these services are actually expanding and improving rather than reducing. In Budget 2017 I secured an additional 11% in funding levels which means that this year my Department will provide almost €263 million to the National Transport Authority (NTA) to fund PSO transport services. This increased level of funding is assisting with the delivery of new and improved services which is reflected in the increases in passenger numbers across the PSO network in rural Ireland.

In addition, Budget 2017 also increased the amount of funding available to support the Rural Transport Programme which will assist with the further improvement of existing services and the development of new services under that Programme. A key feature of the Programme's development is greater integration with other public transport services and enhancing public transport connectivity in rural Ireland overall.

I am not aware of any proposed reductions in services through either Castlecomer or Thomastown as referred to by the Deputy. Castlecomer is currently served by a number of commercial bus services provided by different private operators. Thomastown is served by a mixture of commercial bus services, PSO bus services and of course PSO supported rail services.

Of course I am aware that Bus Éireann has made proposals relating to its commercial X7 Expressway service which currently calls at Callan. While those service changes have not yet been introduced, the Deputy will be aware that the NTA has published its assessment of the impact of the proposed withdrawal of the X7. That NTA assessment notes that Callan will continue to be served by another commercial bus service. In terms of the broader regional impact of the withdrawal of the X7 Expressway, the NTA has proposed some timetabling adjustments to a Rural Transport Programme route to ensure continued regional connectivity with that other service.

The Deputy rightly notes that in addition to the Exchequer funding provided under my Department's PSO programme, funding is also made available through programmes managed by other Departments. In relation to the Department of Education and Skills' School Transport Scheme, I am informed by that Department that it provided €156 million to Bus Éireann in 2016 in relation to the company's administration of the Scheme. The Department of Social Protection recently stated to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport that it expects approximately €77 million in funding will this year be provided to operators in relation to the operation of the Free Travel Scheme.

Taxi Data

1229. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxis currently licensed and in use that are over ten years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13864/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including issues relating to licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport Provision

1230. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the proposed NTA plans to improve the public transport system with a network of park and ride sites; if he will identify these sites; the time frame for them to become operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13865/17]

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, including the provision of Park and Ride facilities. The NTA also oversees the capital funding available for investment in public transport measures in the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety Strategy

1231. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific initiatives he plans to introduce to address the issue of serious disimprovement in road safety in 2016; the timeline for the introduction of these new initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13866/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 2016 saw road deaths in Ireland increase by 15% from 162 to 188. Preliminary data from other European countries, such as the UK, France, Denmark and Norway, as well as in the USA also shows increases in road fatalities in those countries in 2016. The main causes of road deaths on our roads are speeding, intoxicated driving, use of mobile phones and the non-wearing of seat belts.

The Road Traffic Act 2016 of December 2016 includes further safety measures including drug-driving, a new optional speed limit of 20 kph which local authorities can implement, and the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between ourselves and the UK.

I intend to introduce further legislation in 2017, designed to make our roads safer. My im-

mediate priority is the passing of the new penalty for drink-driving, whereby all motorists who are detected drink driving will undergo a period of disqualification. My Department are also working on a number of other legislative Acts in 2017 which will have beneficial effects for road safety.

During 2017 I am convening the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety (including myself, the Minister for Justice and Equality, An Garda Síochána, the local authorities, the Road Safety Authority, the Health and Safety Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General and other stakeholders) every three months to increase the focus on road safety.

In addition, the Road Safety Authority is embarking on a wide-ranging road safety campaign of education and advertising, while the numbers serving in the Garda Traffic Bureau will be increased by 10% which will assist with enforcement, and the Gardaí have confirmed that road safety enforcement is a priority for An Garda Síochána in the Garda Policing Plan for 2017.

Question No. 1232 answered with Question No. 1217.

Rail Services Provision

1233. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the contents of the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, if he will provide a timeframe for the extension of the Luas from Broombridge to Finglas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14048/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades.

The NTA is currently preparing an Integrated Implementation Plan for the delivery of the GDA Strategy for the period 2017-2022. Key to implementation is the capital funding that will be available for investment in public transport infrastructure over the period.

As the Deputy is aware, the Strategy includes a proposal for the extension of Luas Cross City from its terminus at Broombridge to the north of Finglas. The Government's current Capital Plan 'Building on Recovery Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021 does not include funding for this project. The timeline for the project will be determined in the context of the Integrated Implementation Plans brought forward by the NTA for implementation of the Transport Strategy and availability of capital funding in the future.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the detail of the types of fuel used by Irish Rail; the steps Irish Rail has taken to adopting a more environmentally friendly fleet; if Irish Rail uses ultra low sulphur diesel fuel (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14075/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is

a matter for Irish Rail and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sport Ireland Expenditure

1235. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of taxpayers' money that Sport Ireland has spent on legal fees in 2016 to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14086/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): As this question is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred it to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Olympic Games Ticketing Arrangements

1236. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 421 of 23 February 2017, if he will ensure that the internal report by the Olympic Council of Ireland into ticketing arrangements at the Rio Olympic Games is completed; the costs to date regarding the Olympic Council of Ireland internal report; if he has consulted with the new president of the Olympic Council of Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14107/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sporting organisations, including the Olympic Council of Ireland, are independent, autonomous bodies. I have no role in, or responsibility for, operational matters of sporting organisations. Consequently, I have not engaged with the new President of the Olympic Council of Ireland or the OCI in relation to their internal report into ticketing arrangements at the Rio Olympic Games.

The Deputy is aware, however, that an inquiry has been established by my Department to inquire into the circumstances surrounding the distribution of tickets for the Rio Olympic Games and related matters. This inquiry, which commenced on 19 September 2016, is being led by former High Court judge, Mr Justice Carroll Moran. It is expected that Judge Carroll Moran will present his report by the end of this month. Subject to consideration of any legal issues that may arise, it is expected that the report would be published shortly thereafter.

Road Projects Status

1237. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the compulsory purchase order documentation has been published in respect of a specific realignment scheme in County Cork (details supplied). [14110/17]

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

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

Departmental Legal Costs

1238. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14140/17]

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 http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services-2015. The last six months of 2016 will be available shortly.

Civil Defence

1239. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if members of the Civil Defence units are precluded from assisting in directing public traffic or assisting local authorities with events requiring traffic management under existing road traffic legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14156/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): By definition, a power to direct traffic cannot exist unless it is explicitly granted in law.

Under the Road Traffic Acts, the power to direct traffic is given in the first instance to An Garda Síochána. The Acts also provide limited powers to stop traffic in the case of school wardens.

Section 91 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 addresses traffic management in relation to events attracting a large assembly of persons. The section confers certain specific powers on An Garda Síochána in the circumstances in question. Subsection (4) of section 91 also allows an office of An Garda Síochána to authorise a person to act as a temporary parking attendant in such cases. However, this does not include the power to direct traffic.

There is no specific mention of the Civil Defence forces in relation to power to direct traffic in the Acts.

Question No. 1240 answered with Question No. 1168.

EU Regulations

1241. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to go ahead with his stated intention to transfer functions of noise regulation to the Irish Aviation Authority; and the reason he considers it acceptable to create a conflict of interest for the authority in view of the fact that it derives revenue from a levy on aviation and, consequently, has a financial interest in maximising the number of flights. [14160/17]

1242. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will implement the Maastricht recommendations on promoting effective public participation in decision-making in environmental matters prepared under the Aarhus Convention in any new regulatory regime for aviation noise. [14161/17]

1243. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the public

consultation he will undertake in respect of his stated intention to transfer functions of aviation noise regulation to the Irish Aviation Authority; and if that consultation will explain the reason he considers it acceptable to create a conflict of interest for the Authority in view of the fact that it derives revenue from a levy on aviation and consequently has a financial interest in maximising the number of flights. [14162/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1241 to 1243, inclusive, together.

EU Regulation No. 598/2014 entered into force in June 2016 and is directly applicable in the State. The Regulation represents a shift in responsibility for aircraft noise from the airport operator to a separate, independent statutory entity or competent authority that will be required to oversee the delivery of the new, more prescriptive approach to aircraft noise management. As you will be aware, I have already announced that I am appointing the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) as the Competent Authority to deal with aircraft noise management at Dublin airport.

Officials in my Department are currently engaged with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in order to finalise the details of the Statutory Instrument which will transpose EU Regulation 598/2014. The Regulation provides that the Competent Authority shall be independent of any organisation which could be affected by noise-related action and that independence may be achieved through functional separation. The details of achieving independence through this functional separation model are being developed in order to ensure that the IAA's role, in noise management, is fit for purpose to carry out all requirements of the EU Regulation and indeed international Regulations according to ICAO principles. The IAA has an excellent track record in overseeing aviation safety and has an in-depth understanding of aircraft and the operational procedures that play a major role in noise management and I have every confidence in the IAA to carry out this important Regulatory function.

As I have indicated previously, I wish to ensure that there are robust consultation requirements with all key stakeholders, including local residents. It is proposed that the Statutory Instrument will outline requirements concerning the collaborative working arrangements to apply between the Competent Authority and the various statutory bodies that have roles and expertise in relation to noise management. Insofar as public participation arrangements are concerned, before the IAA as Competent Authority makes any decision about noise-related operating restrictions at the airport, there will be an obligation for public consultation and all stakeholders will be able to give their views. The IAA will ensure that public consultation will respect national law and international obligations.

The draft Statutory Instrument is nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to sign off on this important piece of legislation in the coming weeks.

Cycling Policy

1244. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress on implementation of the national cycle policy framework received from local authorities and other stakeholders in 2013 and 2015. [14163/17]

1245. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress which has been made in considering a ban on the movement of HGVs on routes to schools and other specific routes with mixed traffic between 08:30 to 09:30 and 15:00 to 17:00, in pursuance of policy 2.4 of the national cycle policy framework. [14164/17]

1246. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the prog-

ress which has been made in carrying out a study on bicycles, ferries and ports in pursuance of policy 8.9 of the national cycle policy framework. [14165/17]

1247. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps which have been taken to encourage employers to provide cycling parking facilities at existing developments, in pursuance of policy 7.3 of the national cycle policy framework. [14166/17]

1248. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the support which has been provided for introduction of emergency hotlines in all local authorities to enable the public to report potholes and inadequate reinstatement of roads, broken glass on the road and so on, in pursuance of policy 5.5 of the national cycle policy framework. [14167/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1244 to 1248, inclusive, together.

While significant progress has been made under a number of objectives contained in the National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF), including some of those referenced by the Deputy, my Department has not yet undertaken a formal review of the policy framework or its implementation. However, the NCPF has been integrated into the Development Plans of the majority of local authorities so ensuring that the objectives and policies to support and promote cycling are taken account of in current and future planning. In addition, the National Transport Authority (NTA) published the GDA Cycle Network Plan covering the seven local authority areas in the Greater Dublin Area in 2013.

In 2013 and 2015 my Department requested local authorities and other stakeholders for an update on progress on implementation. The Department now intends to undertake a full review of the framework and we will be pursuing this during 2017. In the meantime, I would point out that good progress is being made on some of the specific policies referenced by the Deputy. With regard to cycle parking facilities, funding is provided by my Department to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for a number of mobility management initiatives, one of which is work place travel planning. As part of this initiative employers are encouraged to provide cycle parking and other cycling friendly facilities within their premises. With regard to policy 5.5, I understand that a number of authorities now have an online facility in place on their websites whereby issues such as potholes and other road defects can be registered.

While a formal review of the framework is yet to be undertaken, I think the success of the Framework can be seen in the encouraging increase in the numbers of people cycling shown in the Dublin City Canal Cordon Count published recently by Dublin City Council and the NTA. This showed that over 12,000 people cycled into Dublin's centre in November last year in the morning peak, nearly the same number as used the Luas during the morning peak commuting times (not including the numbers using Dublin Bikes between the canals). I will be keen to see this progress maintained and improved upon as we embark on the review of the NCPF.

Rail Network

1249. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of submissions on hand with the Commission for Rail Regulation from Iarnród Éireann which have not yet had a decision made on them; the outline of the nature of each submission; when they were received by the commission; when it is intended to make a decision in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14191/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Commission for Rail Regulation is the independent regulatory body charged with the responsibility for the regu-

lation of the rail safety and railway activities in the State. In the circumstances, I have referred your question to the Commission for direct reply to you.

Tourism Data

1250. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of successful applications of the most recent capital grants scheme for large tourism projects administered by Fáilte Ireland; the names and addresses of each successful project; the funding amount allocated in respect of each such successful application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14196/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes, including the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Rail Services

1251. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of delays to commuter and DART services in Dublin between 2014 to 2017 to date due to signal faults or failures; and the initiatives under way to ensure that public transport runs as efficiently as possible to encourage it as a transport means. [14263/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Irish Rail 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.

Noise Pollution

1252. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the failure of the Dublin Airport Authority to provide the community liaison group with the longitudinal measurements of noise over their homes; if all relevant information can be made available to residents as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14278/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the daa has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport, including the North Runway project.

However, in order to be of assistance, I have had enquiries made and I understand from daa that it continues to provide information on noise to local communities. Most recently, it arranged a presentation by experts Bickerdike Allen Partners to the Dublin Airport Environmen-

tal Working Group on 15 March regarding noise data from the permanent Noise Monitoring Terminals in the vicinity of the airport.

I also understand that the longitudinal analysis requested at the Community Liaison Group is currently being finalised and will be presented at the next meeting of that forum which is scheduled for 30 March.

Rural Transport Services

1253. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the impact of the cuts sought by Bus Éireann management on rural connectivity. [11745/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The vast majority of people in rural Ireland travel on Public Service Obligation (PSO) services funded by the Exchequer. These services are not under threat. In fact, passenger numbers and funding levels are increasing and new and additional services are being provided by operators under contract with the National Transport Authority.

Similarly the Rural Transport Programme is expanding with increased passenger numbers and funding also being provided to the NTA in its administration of that Programme.

In cases where any commercial operator decides for commercial reasons to make alterations to particular services, the NTA has the statutory authority to assess the transport needs of a particular community and take whatever action it deems appropriate.

I have assured rural Ireland that the NTA will continue to use these statutory powers to ensure public transport connectivity is maintained for rural communities affected by any changes to routes in the commercial bus market.

In recent weeks the NTA has again demonstrated its ability to utilise those powers to react to developments within the commercial bus market. In response to proposed changes announced, although not as yet implemented, by Bus Éireann, the NTA published its assessment of the impact those changes would have on connectivity. That assessment concluded that additional PSO services should be provided in one instance, that alterations should be made to existing Rural Transport Programme services in another and that sufficient connectivity options already existed in relation to others.

The NTA invited feedback from interested parties on its assessments and I would encourage the Deputy to provide such feedback if he has suggestions in respect of particular routes.

State Airports

1254. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the person or body that has been appointed to review the preclearance agreements in respect of Dublin and Shannon Airports. [8553/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, in light of concerns expressed regarding the Executive Order signed by US President Donald J. Trump on 27 January 2017, the Taoiseach requested that the relevant departments undertake a review of US Preclearance at Dublin and Shannon Airports.

My Department, along with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Justice and

Equality contributed to this Review which was furnished to the Taoiseach last month and discussed at Cabinet on 28 February. The Review set out the position with regard to the history of preclearance, the Ireland/US Preclearance Agreement and the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009, its current operation, along with its benefits for Ireland and potential issues which have arisen in the light of the recent Executive Order.

Based on the work undertaken in the context of the Review, it is my view, and the view of Government, that US preclearance arrangements in Dublin and Shannon Airports should remain in place. In arriving at this decision, the following issues were taken into consideration:-

The operation of preclearance, a consensual and non-discriminatory facility, where the roles of Irish and US officials are clearly established, does not give rise to any breach of Ireland's European or International Human Rights obligations, including those in respect of refoulement and the rights of refugees or persons wishing to seek international protection in Ireland.

Preclearance is a valuable service for Ireland facilitating the movement of people between the two countries. It offers a unique service for passengers, providing them with essentially a domestic to domestic connection. Airlines flying to the USA using Dublin and Shannon Airports are permitted to fly to less congested domestic terminals at US airports, which enables faster onward connections for passengers.

It is a strategic asset for the airports in question, and a key enabler of market growth, which improves our global connectivity.

Sports Facilities Provision

1255. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure full completion of the national sports complex in Abbotstown; the timeframe for doing so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14279/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Substantial work has been undertaken already to develop the National Sports Campus to meet the evolving needs of the sporting community in Ireland and I am fully committed to its further development.

As the Deputy is aware, significant progress in recent years means world-class facilities are now in place at the National Sports Campus for a variety of sports. Most recently, Phase 1 of the National Indoor Arena, comprising a National Indoor Athletics Training Centre, a National Gymnastics Training Centre and a National Indoor Training Centre catering for over 20 sports, was officially opened by An Taoiseach in January 2017.

Other facilities in place at the National Sports Campus include the National Aquatic Centre, the National Horse Sport Arena, a High Performance Training Centre, FAI and GAA Training Centres, the National Modern Pentathlon Centre, the National Diving Training Centre, the National Cross-Country Track, Jogging Tracks and Trim Trails, a Multi-Sport Synthetic Pitch facility and two large multi-sport turf pitches accommodating Gaelic games, football and rugby. The National Sports Campus is also home to 27 National Governing Bodies of Sport.

Progress at the Campus is continuing this year. The development of a Cricket Ireland Training Facility is currently underway along with additional office accommodation for Sport Ireland and for one further National Governing Body.

Further developments currently proposed include Phase 2 of the National Indoor Arena, comprising covered pitches and ancillary facilities, and a National Velodrome and Badminton

Centre. The availability of capital funding for these two proposed projects will be determined in the Mid Term Review of the Capital Plan, and timing will then be clearer.

Sport and Recreational Development

1256. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the national physical activity plan; his views on whether it has been effective; and the further actions and initiatives that are planned under this programme. [14280/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The National Physical Activity Plan was published in January 2016 and its implementation is being overseen by an Implementation Group co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Health. Work has commenced on over 50 of the 60 actions contained in the plan. An Implementation Template, showing progress to date and work planned for each action, is planned to be published on the Healthy Ireland website by mid 2017.

The Plan contains six actions which specifically relate to monitoring and evaluation, including the establishment of a national research system to monitor physical activity levels in key target groups. Those actions provide a sound basis for appropriate monitoring which will facilitate effective implementation of the Plan.

Traffic Calming Measures

1257. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his general policy when it comes to funding traffic calming measures at schools; if there are proposals being considered by his Department at present to enhance funding in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14004/17]

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

Applications were sought last year from local authorities for funding in 2017 for my Department's Safety Improvement Works Programme and it is open to local authorities to submit these types of projects for consideration under this grant category. Alternatively, it is also open to local authorities to consider funding such projects from its Discretionary Grant.

It is important to reiterate that it is a matter for the local authority to select, prioritise and agree the works to be funded and progressed each year as part of its annual works programme. In addition, the purpose of Exchequer funding is to supplement the own resources of the local authority, not to meet the full cost of schemes.

Ministerial Allowances

1258. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14571/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information the deputy is seeking is currently being collated and checked and a reply will be forwarded to the deputy in due course.

Legislative Programme

1259. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 will be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12992/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 is scheduled for Report Stage in Dáil Éireann this week. The timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

Legislative Programme

1260. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reason there has been a delay in the enactment of the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016; when it will be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13791/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 is scheduled for Report Stage in Dáil Éireann this week. The timing of enactment of the Bill will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

Both the Bill itself and Directive 2013/34/EU, which it transposes, are technical pieces of legislation. This has meant that a number of complex issues have arisen during the transposition process. As a result, enactment has taken longer than hoped.

In order to mitigate the effects of this delay, section 14 of the Bill provides that companies may apply, in certain circumstances, provisions of the Bill to financial statements in respect of financial years that commenced in 2015 and later.

Low Pay Commission Expenditure

1261. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total annual running costs of the Low Pay Commission. [13810/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Low Pay Commission was established through the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015. Its principal function is, once each year, to examine the national minimum hourly rate of pay and to make a recommendation to the Minister respecting the rate, ensuring that all decisions are evidence based, fair and sustainable, and do not create significant adverse consequences for employment or competitiveness.

The Commission was allocated €500,000 in 2015. This was broken down on a pay (€270,000) and non-pay basis (€230,000). Expenditure in 2015 was €155,500 (pay) and €95,100 (non-pay).

The Commission's budget for 2016 was €474,000 with expenditure for the year of €305,000 - €229,000 (pay) and €76,000 (non-pay).

The allocation for 2017 is €477,000 - €247,000 (pay) and €230,000 (non-pay).

Question No. 1262 withdrawn.

Legislative Programme

1263. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 will be enacted (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13911/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 is scheduled for Report Stage in Dáil Éireann this week. The timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

In light of the benefits for many companies provided for in that Bill, it remains a legislative priority for the Government.

Legislative Programme

1264. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Bill that includes new rules regarding financial reporting standard 105, FRS105, has been enacted; the details of the rules for small businesses to meet the criteria set out in the FRS105; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14123/17]

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 scheduled for Report Stage in the Dáil this week.

Clearly, the timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

FRS 105 is the Financial Reporting Standard applicable to the Micro-entities Regime. The Bill introduces new provisions for a new category of micro company, which is a subset of the category of small company. Accordingly, FRS 105 will be available to micro companies once the Bill is enacted and commenced.

Manufacturing Sector

1265. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a manufacturing industry (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12803/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The property mentioned is not under the ownership of IDA Ireland. The Agency is aware, however, of its availability and has engaged with its owners about marketing the facility as suitable for potential FDI investors. The property has also been included on the IDA's database of available office and manufacturing buildings in Co. Westmeath.

While Enterprise Ireland does not purchase property for its clients, it is working with relevant enterprise development partners regarding the future of the building concerned.

Both Agencies are available to show the property to existing and potential clients who may require premises for investment in the area.

IDA Portfolio

1266. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12826/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland does not disclose details regarding property transactions for reasons of commercial and client confidentiality. The Deputy may wish to provide IDA Ireland with his constituent's details, either directly or through my office, to facilitate a response.

Brexit Issues

1267. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings she has had with British companies which wish to retain access to the Single Market after Brexit and wish to relocate to another member state; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12846/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I engage on an ongoing basis with overseas companies, including those with operations in the UK, regarding the possibility of new or expanded investments in Ireland. These businesses are interested in Ireland for a variety of reasons, including our continuing access to the EU single market but also on account of our talented workforce, track record as a successful home to global businesses and first-class education system.

Our focus now is converting the interest shown to date by potential investors into new projects on the ground. Both IDA Ireland and the Government will continue to work hard with that goal in mind.

Job Creation Data

1268. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created in the enterprise park, Kilmallock, County Limerick since 2014. [12882/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Kilmallock Enterprise Park, County Limerick was formerly owned by Shannon Development. The ownership transferred to Shannon Properties following the dissolution of Shannon Development and in December 2016 the Enterprise Park was sold to a third party.

The Enterprise Park is not State-owned and therefore I am unable to provide any information in relation to the employment numbers created since 2014.

The Kilmallock Enterprise Centre, located in the Enterprise Park, has received capital support under the 2007-2009 Community Enterprise Centre Scheme for its construction. The Enterprise Centre also received funding for a Business Manager from Enterprise Ireland.

Work Permits Applications

1269. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the review of the work permit for a person (details supplied); if assistance will be offered tak-

ing into account the specialised need; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12919/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The General Employment Permit renewal application for the person concerned was refused on the 18/11/2016 on the grounds that the remuneration offered was less than the annual remuneration stated on the original employment permit and the renewal application was not accompanied by required copies of payslips.

A request for a review of this decision was received on the 12/12/2016. Having examined this review request, the Reviewing Officer upheld the decision in this case on the 13/03/2017 and the applicant has been notified of this decision in writing.

Legislative Programme

1270. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when she envisages the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 will be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13144/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 is scheduled for Report Stage in Dáil Éireann on the week commencing 20th March 2017. The timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

Work Permits Applications

1271. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application for a work permit by a person (details supplied) whose services are required urgently by a medical facility in the north west region; if this application will be processed in view of the fact that the person cannot apply for a work visa until the work permit has been granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13194/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): A critical skills employment permit issued in respect of the named individual on the 7th March 2017.

Ministerial Meetings

1272. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings and engagements she has had with the Industrial Development Agency, Enterprise Ireland and InterTrade Ireland from June 2016 to date in 2017. [13196/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am in regular formal and informal contact with the Agencies under my Department's remit. Since June 2016 I have had eight meetings with the CEO of IDA Ireland, nine meetings with the CEO of Enterprise Ireland and nine meetings with the CEO of InterTradeIreland.

These meetings are in addition to my participation in Agency engagements including client events, job announcements and overseas marketing programmes.

Legislative Programme

1273. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of legislation on a general scheme of copyright approved by the Government (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13230/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I have obtained Government approval for a General Scheme of a Bill entitled Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) (Miscellaneous Intellectual Property) Bill. The Bill is currently being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

Detailed information on the contents of this Bill has not yet been made public, while the progress of drafting is underway. However, one of the primary intentions of the Bill is to make certain improvements in the area of access to justice for intellectual property claims. In particular, the Bill will facilitate lower value intellectual property infringement cases to be brought before the Circuit and District courts. I intend to publish the Bill as soon as possible, once the initial drafting work is complete.

The Bill does not deal with the issue of self-representation before the Courts. The Deputy will appreciate that, in general, the issue of the jurisdiction of the courts is not an aspect that comes within my Department's direct responsibility. The question of whether companies should be permitted to represent themselves in Court comes within the policy remit of the Department of Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality also deals with matters related to legal costs in the courts.

Departmental Programmes

1274. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the actions her Department is taking to increase the levels of female entrepreneurship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13234/17]

1275. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the low level of female entrepreneurship here according to a report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13235/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1274 and 1275 together.

The most recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report figures for 2014 show there are at least twice as many men than women in each category of entrepreneurship.

The Government's National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland was launched in October 2014 and sets out the Government's strategic objectives as a facilitator within the Irish entrepreneurship ecosystem.

One objective of the policy statement is to promote female entrepreneurship through identification and promotion of female role models, targeted events and awards, support for female entrepreneur networks and promotion of a dedicated area on corporate websites.

My Department has established a web page targeted specifically at current and potential female entrepreneurs. The 2017 Action Plan for Jobs calls for the Roll out the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative and to further develop female centred entrepreneurial and start up initiatives.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are also actively engaged in encouraging and inspiring an increase in female-led businesses. In 2016, 60% of participants attending their training programmes were female with 44% of the mentoring participants were female. More than 900 businesswomen attended the range of 2016 annual National Women's Enterprise Day events. This was considered highly successful and it is planned to run NWED 2017 in a similar format.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) has been running female only feasibility and competitive funds since 2012. The Female Entrepreneurship Unit had another successful year with an increase in female-led start-ups to 63, including 19 High Potential Start-Ups. The next Female Specific Start Fund will open on 3 May 2017 which will accelerate the growth of female-led start-up companies.

An important aspect of the networking programme is the promotion of successful female entrepreneurs as role models and the use of mentoring and networking opportunities which aims to build confidence of newly emerging female entrepreneurs. In 2017, The Female Leadership and Growing Ambition Conference hosted by Enterprise Ireland took place on 9th March in Bank of Ireland, College Green. The Female Founders Roadshow visited six locations: Dundalk, Galway, Athlone, Donegal, Limerick and Cork. EI also sponsor awards such as Tatler Business Woman of the Year Awards. They developed a series of female accelerator programmes in partnership with knowledge providers. These included Going for Growth and the DCU Ryan Academy Female Propeller Programme.

These initiatives demonstrate that the Government is firmly backing female entrepreneurship and considers it an important area of job creation within the economy.

Brexit Issues

1276. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has read a report on Brexit (details supplied) which indicates that Ireland is among two countries whose GDPs will suffer the biggest drop as a consequence of Brexit as indicated in pages seven, eight and ten of the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13247/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am aware of the CEPS research and welcome this contribution to the ongoing Brexit debate.

The report recognises that Ireland faces unique challenges from Brexit, especially given the all-Ireland issues that arise.

The extremely close nature of our trading relationship with the UK means that the scale of the overall economic impact is probably greater for Ireland than for many other partners. The direct trading relationship between Ireland and the UK is enormous: €1.2 billion is traded between the two countries every week, with a considerable volume transiting through the UK onward to other EU Member States.

The UK is the most important market for Irish goods and services and we are Britain's fifth largest export market.

As a consequence of the importance of this issue, there is a whole of Government approach in place focusing on Brexit issues and my Department and its agencies are to the forefront of this effort.

In advance of the Referendum my Department conducted a contingency risk assessment of the potential impacts of Brexit across policy areas of my Department. We have refined our

analysis post-Referendum and we have been working with Agencies to put in place actions to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities.

We have also been working with colleagues across Government to analyse potential sectorial impacts and consider the implications of various scenarios which may emerge as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

With regard to sectorial impacts, specifically my Department is currently undertaking research to examine the implications for the most exposed enterprise sectors - in terms of trading and economic relationships - of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union. This research will inform an assessment of the way in which Brexit will affect individual sectors of the economy, and the ongoing response by Government and the Enterprise Agencies.

As the Deputy is aware, the Enterprise Agencies are playing an active and vital role in our response to Brexit. For example, Enterprise Ireland has engaged in extensive outreach with each of its 1,476 client companies that export to the UK - critically these companies employ 100,000 full time employees across all regions of Ireland. EI is driving competitiveness in Irish companies through a suite of supports to reduce supply-chain costs and increase efficiencies as a means of improving operating margins.

IDA Ireland is constantly engaged with clients across its entire portfolio and continues to actively pursue any opportunity for mobile investment following the Brexit announcement. FDI opportunities are likely to be found along differing timelines, partially influenced by sector. The potential sources of FDI are likely to come from:

- existing IDA Clients with a presence in Ireland who also have a presence in the UK;

- overseas clients (US, European and Asian) who have a presence in the UK but not in Ireland;

- UK companies operating in the UK who now need certain access to the European Market; and

- International clients without a presence in Europe seeking a European home.

Further, my Department is also funding a project through InterTrade Ireland on the North-South trade implications of Brexit. This project will provide an understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit.

Finally, my Department is leading consideration of the trade and investment impacts arising from Brexit and will reflect the CEPS research in its ongoing programme of research and analysis.

Departmental Bodies Board Remuneration

1277. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will confirm that in line with the one person-one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of her Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13333/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The following State Boards are under the remit of my Department:

- The Competition and Consumer Commission

- Enterprise Ireland

- The Health and Safety Authority

- IDA Ireland

- The Personal Injuries Assessment Board

- Science Foundation Ireland

- The National Standards Authority of Ireland

- The Low Pay Commission

- The Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority

In line with the once person one salary principle, I can confirm that no public servant who is a member of these Boards or Agencies is in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Residency Permits

1278. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has a record of any employer making an inquiry regarding employing and sponsoring the residency of a person (details supplied) on the basis of their skills. [13494/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Employment Permits Acts 2003 – 2014 provide that in order to work in the State all non-EEA nationals require a valid Employment Permit from my Department or relevant immigration permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality which allows them to reside and work in the State without the requirement for an Employment Permit.

The Irish State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within the workforce of the European Union and other EEA states. Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national for a specific position.

The Employment Permits Section of my Department processes applications for employment permits and they have no record of an application in respect of the named individual.

Business Regulation

1279. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will ensure more regulation in the beauty industry (details supplied). [13538/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I, as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct policy function in relation to this matter. I note, however, that my colleague, the Minister for Health, already has policy responsibility for some existing issues relating to the beauty industry including the use of sun-beds and cosmetics.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

1280. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there is grant assistance or other supports available for SME companies in the services sector towards the cost of helping them with the cost of the required training courses when employing new staff (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13551/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): There are over 170 different Government supports for Irish based start-ups and small businesses. 'Supportingsmes.ie' is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups and small businesses navigate the range of Government supports available.

By answering the eight quick questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location be able to:

- Find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them; and

- Obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit.

The tool is available at: *www.supportingsmes.ie*

The company in question might also like to make contact with its Local Enterprise Office. The 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) nationwide are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business.

In the first instance, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant State supports available through Agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Skillnets and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations of relevance to micro-enterprises and SMEs.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (up to 10 employees) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories, i.e., Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea) Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up) and Business Development grants for existing businesses that want to expand. (It should be noted that the LEOs do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses).

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs may be able to offer 'soft' support in the form of training and/or provide a mentor to work directly with the business proposer. The suite of training programmes provided by the LEOs covers a variety of business functions such as: financial management, sales & marketing, social media, HR, operations, customer care, innovation, competitiveness and management development.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to Microfinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks.

Further information on the services available from the LEOs can be accessed at *www.local-enterprise.ie.*

Departmental Staff Data

1281. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff employed within her Department for each of the years from 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form; the number of staff recorded as on sick leave or absent during each of these years, in tabular form; the number of days lost in each of these years as a result of sick leave or other non-holiday absences; the grades most affected; the provision in place for such absences of staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13750/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	01/01/2017 - 10/03/2017
Number of Staff Employed (year-end figure)	843	857	854	848	857	864
Number of Staff who had a Sick Leave Absence during the year	599	580	557	533	560	244
Number of Days Lost due to Sick Leave	8774	8496	8101	7248	7764	1404
Number of Days lost due to Non-Holiday Absences **	2049	2534	2722	2137	3046	494
Total Number of Work Days in year	229	229	229	229	229	229

** Non-Holiday Absences include:

Paid Adoptive

Parental

Paid Compassionate

Paid Examination

Paid Family Illness

Paid Force Majeure

Paid Jury Service

Paid Marriage

Paid Paternity

Paid Reserved Defence Forces

Paid Study

Paid Union Business

Paid Witness at Court

Unpaid Domestic Reasons

Unpaid Marriage

Unpaid Study

Unpaid Unauthorised Absence

Across my Department the Grades that were most affected by sick leave over the period 2012 to 10/03/2017 on average were Clerical Officers and Executive Officers.

In accordance with the practices set down by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform my Department does not hire temporary staff to cover sick leave. Therefore cover for a staff member who is out sick falls to the other members of staff.

Third Level Education

1282. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the drop in the number of students applying for third level courses in engineering and technology; her further views on the future impact it will have on the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13974/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation I am fully cognisant of the need to focus on ensuring that the numbers of students being educated in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) match the skills needs of the economy in Ireland. I am working very closely with my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills to ensure we have the required pipeline of skills supply in terms of both quantity and quality to meet the current and future needs of the enterprise sector. I am particularly pleased that there has been an increase in the level of uptake of STEM at second level according to Science Foundation Ireland (SFI). This has increased to 273,000 in 2016 compared to 253,000 in 2015.

I have noted the early indications of a drop in the number of students applying through the CAO to do third level courses in engineering and technology in 2017 as against 2016. However, I note also that the number of students applying in 2017 (34,850) is similar to the numbers that applied in 2015 (35,210) and is higher than the number of students who applied in 2014 (32,444) and in 2013 (29,730). We will continue to focus on promoting the opportunities

in STEM-related careers over the coming months as students consider their options and aligned with the CAO change of mind timelines.

In addition, I would draw the Deputy's attention to a number of initiatives being undertaken by my Department and its Agencies to promote STEM careers. For example, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), an Agency under the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, leads the Smart Futures initiative, which focuses on driving awareness of careers in STEM at post-primary level. It is a government-industry-education programme, which is co-ordinated and managed by SFI, in partnership with the Engineers Ireland's STEPS programme. It is supported by over 50 organisations from research and academia, as well as partners such as BioPharma Ireland, the Royal Society of Chemistry, ICT Ireland, the Irish Medical Devices Association (IMDA), the Institute of Physics, the American Chamber of Commerce and many other stakeholder groups. The smartfutures.ie website, developed as part of the programme is a rich information resource for students, teachers, parents and guidance counsellors providing information on the four streams under STEM (S – Science), (T – Technology), (E – Engineering) and (M- Maths) and the career pathways available to students.

Separate to the Smart Futures Initiative, SFI continues to promote the advancement of STEM education and learning. The Government's National Skills Strategy was published in January 2016. The Strategy identifies Ireland's current skills profile, provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements, including in the STEM area and sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives can be achieved. During the Strategy's first year, progress has been made and a number of initiatives have been actioned, including:

Action 18 - Increase support for the Smart Futures and SFI Discover programmes and build on success of initiatives including Student Enterprise Awards, CoderDojo, Science Week Ireland, BT Young Scientist. (Innovation 2020).

Smart Futures continuing ongoing activities with over 100,000 students engaged and over 1,600 role models trained over the first three year strategy. Women in STEM forum held in SFI to connect programmes targeting young females. Science Week audience reach broadened including two new regional festivals, an extensive programming schedule on RTÉ and a larger social media presence. Science Rising communications campaign delivered through 2016 highlighting the science of the everyday to Irish public. 42 projects supported through the SFI Discover programme call to promote and support STEM engagement and education of Irish public.

Action 28 - Work with the National Parents Councils for Primary and Post-Primary to disseminate skills and labour market information to parents in accessible formats.

SFI and National Parents Council completed a survey of primary school parents to inform activity. A parents' advice brochure has been developed. Parent information sessions have been delivered. Skills and labour market information aimed at parents are available on the Smart Futures website.

Action 62 - Working with industry volunteers and schools, seek to ensure every second level school is offered at least one school visit annually through the Smart Futures School Visit Programme.

Every school has been contacted and offered a visit. Every school may request a Smart Futures visit on the Smart Futures website. SFI attended student & teacher conferences and events e.g. BT Young Scientists Exhibition and TY Expo, advertising Smart Futures to teachers.

Action 113 - Increase enrolments of postgraduate researchers to address demand in the

economy. (Innovation 2020).

Funding has been secured to increase activity across SFI programmes, most of which fund postgraduate researchers. SFI is designing a PhD programme to develop and enhance the skills of PhD students through cohort-based, discipline centric, PhD programmes to ensure the provision of a skilled in demand workforce to meet the demands of industry and academia.

Workplace Relations Commission

1283. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 308 of 8 March 2017, the number of workplace inspections and total amount of wages recovered in 2016 for the child care sector alone; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14065/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body established on 1st October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The WRC has responsibility for information provision, workplace advice, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, inspection and enforcement in relation to employment rights, equality and equal status matters and industrial relations.

Inspectors of the WRC carry out inspections of employer records with a view to determining compliance with employment rights and employment permits legislation. These inspections arise:

- In response to complaints received of alleged non-compliance with relevant employment rights legislation;

- As part of compliance campaigns which focus on compliance in specific sectors or specific pieces of legislation, or

- As routine inspections, which act as a control measure.

The WRC's aim is to achieve voluntary compliance with employment law through the provision of education and awareness, inspection of employers' employment records and enforcement where necessary.

The Deputy will be aware from my previous reply that in 2016 the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) recovered a total of €1,521,600 in unpaid wages in 4,830 cases.

Details in relation to the number of workplace inspections undertaken by the WRC in 2016 in the childcare sector alone are not available as employers engaged in childcare related activities are included with the health and nursing sectors for statistical purposes. In addition, inspections of employers of domestics workers may include some childcare cases but these childcare cases are not identified separately. The overall numbers for the year 2016 are as follows :

Sector	Number of Employers Inspected	Amount of Wages Recovered
Domestic Worker	22	€4,728
Health Nursing and Childcare	82	€156,071

Job Losses

1284. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the contact she had with the owners and or management of a company (details supplied) in Nenagh over the past 18 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14117/17]

1285. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when her attention was drawn, either orally or in writing, to the planned job losses at a company (details supplied) in Nenagh; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14118/17]

1286. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to support the retraining of those staff members who have recently lost their jobs at a company (details supplied) in Nenagh; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14119/17]

1287. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will establish a specific jobs task force for north Tipperary in view of the recent job losses at a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14120/17]

1288. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has contacted the Department of Social Protection requesting it to provide advice to the staff of a company (details supplied) on their entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14121/17]

1289. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if SOLAS has been requested to provide guidance to the staff of a company (details supplied) regarding training and skill needs to seek other jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14122/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1284 to 1289, inclusive, together.

Over recent months, since this company began a global assessment of its international operations, the Government, through IDA Ireland, has been intensively engaged with its senior management to try and safeguard their continuing presence in Nenagh. These efforts included highlighting the supports which the State could offer to help secure the future of their operations there. I myself also spoke to senior management two weeks ago. Unfortunately, however, the company could not ultimately be persuaded to maintain its facility in Nenagh.

My Department contacted the Department of Social Protection immediately after the closure announcement was made to ensure that appropriate arrangements would be made in relation to the provision of relevant assistance services to the affected workers. All relevant State bodies will now seek to ensure that appropriate services are provided to the company's employees in the time ahead. I have also directed that the remit of an Inter-Agency group - that is already in place in Tipperary - will be extended so that it can too assist the company's employees. I want to emphasise as well that a particular effort will be made to identify and secure new job creation projects in the county to replace the positions that will unfortunately be lost.

Departmental Legal Costs

1290. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total amount spent externally by her Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to her Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14135/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): 1st January to 31st December 2015

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Ailill O'Reilly BL	Counsels' Advices	5,842.50
David Dodd BL	Counsels' Advices	3,690.00
Philip Rahn BL	Counsels' Advices	2,263.20
Sean Gillane SC	Counsels' Advices	7,687.50
Kilroys Solicitors	Legal advice on Export Credit Insurance issues	4,802.00
Conor Feeney BL	Legal advice re online employment permit application forms.	308.00
Jennifer Goode BL	Legal advice on the transposition of EU directives	2,152.50
Alan Haugh BL	Fees paid to barrister for legal advice, assistance in drafting Workplace Relations Bill	17,066.26
Alan Haugh BL	Fees paid to barrister for regulatory advice	824.00
Anthony Kerr BL	Fees paid to barrister for legal advice on domestic workers	615.00
Conor Power BL	Fees paid to barrister for E-commerce advice	1,030.00
Rosemary Healy Rae BL	Fees paid to barrister for legal advice on taxation	1,030.00
Paul Anthony McDermott BL	Fees paid to barrister for legal advice data protection	2,460.00
Conor Bourke BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Relevant Papers & Representation in Proceedings Before the Dublin Circuit Court	11,562.00
Maurice Collins SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Pleadings & Representation in Proceedings Before the High Court	9,225.00
Paul Greene SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Pleadings & Representation in Proceedings Before the High Court	4,526.40
Brian Murray SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Pleadings & Representation in Proceedings Before the Court of Appeal	42,189.00

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Paul O'Higgins SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Pleadings & Representation in Proceedings Before the High Court	3,997.50
Diana Stuart BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Pleadings & Representation in Proceedings Before the High Court	3,394.80
Conor Feeney BL	Legal scrutiny and settlement of draft Employment Permit Regulations	3,075.00

1st January to 31st December 2016

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Conor Feeney BL	Legal Scrutiny and Settlement of Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Electromagnetic Fields) Regulations 2016	1,845.00
Conor Feeney BL	Legal Scrutiny and Settlement of Dangerous Substances (Retail and Private Petroleum Stores) (Amendment) Regulations 2016	307.50
Kilroy's Solicitors	Legal advice on Export Credit Insurance issues	925.58
Nessa Cahill BL	Legal services for the Report by Nessa Cahill BL and Kevin Duffy, Chairman of the Labour Court "Expert examination and review of laws on the protection of employee interests when assets are separated from the operating entity"	12,300.00
Jennifer Goode, BL	Legal advice on the transposition of EU directives	10,455.00
Aillil O'Reilly BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Pleadings & Representation in High Court Proceedings	8,333.25
Brian Murray SC	Counsel's Advices & Representation in Court of Appeal Proceedings	861.00
Declan Murphy BL	Counsel's Advices & Drafting Pleadings and Inter-Partes Correspondence, & Representation in High Court Proceedings	16,555.80

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Douglas Clarke BL	Counsel's Advices	14,353.54
Maurice G. Collins SC	Counsel's Advices and representations in Supreme Court Proceedings	9,225.00
Sean Gillane SC	Counsel's Advices	4,674.00
Rochford Brady Legal Services	Presentation of Court Documents for ODCE	981.60
Brosnan Investigations	Service of Summons for ODCE	282.12
J & A Davis	Service of Summons for ODCE	795.66
Kellkee Services	Service of Summons for ODCE	151.60
Peter Fallon BL	Service of Summons for ODCE	1,269.16
O'Mara, Geraghty McCourt Solicitors	Professional Fees for Consultations	984.00
Connellan & Co Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	615.00
Dermot G O'Donovan & Partners	Legal services (Prosecutions)	747.75
Donal W. Dunne BL	Legal services (Prosecutions)	8,702.25
Emma Muldowney BL	Legal services (Prosecutions)	8100.00
Fiona Sheehan BL	Legal services (Prosecutions)	571.95
Frank Nyhan & Associates Solicitors	Civil enforcement fees	735.54
Gary Irwin Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,168.50
Gerald Meaney State Solicitor	Legal services (Prosecutions)	2,952.00
Geraldine Gillece B.C.L.	Legal services (Prosecutions)	2,583.00
Jeremiah Healy, Healy Crowley & Co Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	4,674.00
John Brosnan & Company, Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,230.00
John Hughes, Solicitor	Legal services (Prosecutions) and Civil enforcement fees	10,276.75
Leahy & Partner Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	12,982.70
Liddy Scollan Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	3,874.50

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Martin G Linnane & Co. Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,168.50
Millards Solicitors & Notary Public	Legal services (Prosecutions)	2,829.00
Niamh Tuite & Company Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	12,883.81
O'Doherty Warren & Associates Solicitors	Civil Enforcement fees	1,045.50
Paul Fitzpatrick	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,527.66
Peter D. Jones & Co. Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions) and Civil enforcement fees	3,249.66
Rory Hayden & Co. Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	6,949.50
Rory P. Benville Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	8,425.50
Rosemary Healy-Rae BL	Legal services (Prosecutions)	5,043.00
Sharon E. Murphy State Solicitor	Legal services (Prosecutions)	10,086.00
Steen O'Reilly Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,168.50
Vincent Deane & Co. Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	1,291.50
Wolfe & Co. Solicitors	Legal services (Prosecutions)	10,190.19
Mazars	Legal Advice	11,047.86
Allan Crann BL	Legal Representation, High Court	4,800.00
Gerard Durcan SC	Legal Representation, Supreme Court	6,150.00
Grainne Gilmore BL	Legal Representation, Supreme Court	12,915.00
Conor Power SC	Legal representation, Supreme Court	18,450.00
Breffni Gordon BL	Judicial Review 2016 344 JR	64,218.30
Emma Muldowney BL	Judicial Review 2016 344 JR	5,750.00
Michael McDowell BL	Judicial Review 2016 344 JR	9,225.00
Niamh Tuite & Co. Solicitors	Judicial Review 2016 344 JR	78,451.08
Shane Murphy BL	Judicial Review 2016 344 JR	51,045.00
Ivan Gramatikov	Legal Research	23,985.00

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Conor Feeney BL	Legal scrutiny and settlement of draft Employment Permit Regulations	1,230.00
Kilroys Solicitors	Legal advice on Export Credit Insurance issues	925.58

1st January to 15th March 2017

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Remy Farrell SC	Counsel's Advices	4,612.50
Sean Guerin SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Draft Pleadings & Representation in High Court Proceedings	13,837.50
Sinead McGrath BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Pleadings & Representation in High Court Proceeding	3,413.25
Declan Murphy BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Pleadings & Representation in Court of Appeal Proceedings	37,318.20
Brian Murray SC	Counsel's Advices & Drafting of Statutory Production Requirements	12,177.00
Paul O' Higgins SC	Counsel's Advices, Settling Draft Pleadings & Representation in High Court Proceedings	5,535.00
Aillil O' Reilly BL	Counsel's Advices, Drafting Pleadings & Representation in High Court Proceedings	3,708.00
Anthony Thuillier BL	Counsel's Advices & Drafting of Intended High Court Proceedings	1,657.50
Conor Feeney BL	Legal scrutiny and settlement of draft Employment Permit Regulations	1,230
Donal W. Dunne State Solicitor	Legal Fees	2,460.00
Fergus Mullen State Solicitor	Legal Fees	950.00
Francis W. Hutchinson Solicitor	Legal Fees	1,168.50
Frank Nyhan & Associates Solicitors	Legal Fees	774.59
Gerald Meaney State Solicitor	Legal Fees	1,107.00

Legal Advice Provider	Description of Service	Amount paid - €
Ivan Gramatikov	Legal Research	9,360.00
John Hughes Solicitor	Legal Fees	1,860.00
Leahy & Partners Solicitors	Legal Fees	1,806.56
Liddy Scollan Solicitors	Legal Fees	2,337.00
Niamh Tuite & Company Solicitors	Legal Fees	3,034.98
Paul Fitzpatrick Solicitor	Legal Fees	2,337.00
Peter D Jones & Co. Solicitors	Legal Fees	2,337.00
Rory P. Benville Solicitors	Legal Fees	1,168.50
Rosemary Healy-Rae BL	Legal Fees	922.50
Steen O'Reilly Solicitors	Legal Fees	3,505.50
Venetia R Taylor BL	Legal Fees	300.00
Vincent Deane & Co. Solicitors	Legal Fees	1,414.50
Wolfe & Co Solicitor	Legal Fees	3,699.05

Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment

1291. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if it is standard practice for a private consultant to be used to recruit for non-commercial State employment vacancies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14262/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In general, recruitment within the State Agencies under the remit of my Department is carried out by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

However, in some instances where it has not been possible to use the services of PAS, for example, for certain specialist posts, or where PAS are not in a position to assist due to the volume of campaigns on hand, the services of an external recruitment agency has been used.

The Commission for Public Service Appointments' Code of Practice on Appointment to Positions in the Civil Service and Public Service sets out the standards to be observed in relation to appointments in the public service. The Code allows for the use of listed recruitment consultants providing the Agency concerned complies with the terms and conditions of the recruitment licence, the Code of Practice and other guidelines issued by the Commission.

Ministerial Allowances

1292. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under her remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14567/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Since 2011 no Ministers or Ministers of State at my Department have claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin.

In July and September 2016, the Department paid for the hotel accommodation costs for three separate nights for Minister John Halligan T.D. who needed to have overnight hotel ac-

commodation adjacent to Dublin airport. The total costs borne by the Department for the three nights amounted to €443.

The overnights were required on two occasions as the Minister had very early morning flights out of Dublin.

The third overnight was necessitated by a late evening flight arrival into Dublin whereby the Minister had an early morning meeting in the Oireachtas the following day.

Child Care Services Funding

1293. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a community group (details supplied) can apply for funding and support to her Department in the provision of a community crèche and playschool which will consist of an extension to the existing community hall; the programmes they can apply under; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13500/17]

1302. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there are any schemes that a community group (details suppled) can apply to for funding and support to her Department in the provision of a community crèche and playschool which will consist of an extension to the existing community hall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13501/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1293 and 1302 together.

In relation to the Early Years Capital programme for 2017, yesterday I announced that funding will be made available under this programme in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: New Places (€3 million total available – maximum €50,000 per grant);

- Strand 2: Building improvements and maintenance/refurbishment (€500,000 total available, maximum €20,000 per grant, Community childcare services only);

- Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area (€500,000 total available, maximum €5,000 per grant).

Pobal will be responsible for administering the programme on behalf of my Department. Further details and information on how to make an application for funding will be available shortly on the Pobal website *www.pobal.ie.*

Additionally, at the recent launch of the Action Plan for School Age Childcare I announced a separate €3 million in capital funding for services providing school age childcare. This capital scheme will open in April and will encourage expansion in the number of school age childcare places along with enhancements to quality.

Child Protection

1294. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12824/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am deeply concerned by the plight of the young people who were in the Calais camp, and particularly the many unaccompanied minors who were at the

frontline of this terrible situation. The All Party Dáil motion, approved by Government on 10 November last, called on the Government to work with the French authorities, to identify up to 200 unaccompanied minors previously living in the unofficial migrant camp in Calais, and who have expressed a desire to come and stay in Ireland. An initial group of 16 young people have been identified by French officials to be the first to go through the assessment process to come to Ireland.

When this issue was first coming to public prominence I obtained a clear plan from my officials and from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provided me with cost estimates but has correctly added the proviso that these will have to be monitored as the needs of the young people are not yet fully known. This estimate was provided prior to individual assessments regarding age or needs of the young people concerned. Due to trauma experienced by the young people and personal challenges the most suitable service to meet the needs of the young people may be a residential setting. As the Deputy will understand residential care is the most expensive type of care provided by Tusla. Additionally, included in the estimate was the provision of therapeutic and legal supports. As the young people arrive, we will get a better understanding of their needs.

The estimate refers to a full year cost but as the young people will be arriving on a phased basis the cost for 2017 should be considerably less. I am closely monitoring the emerging situation and I am in close contact with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure this whole of Government response to this humanitarian effort is successful.

Child Care Services Funding

1295. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding early years education; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [12842/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that staff in the childcare sector have a critical role to play in delivering high quality childcare services and that they deserve to be valued and respected for the important role they play with our children. Because childcare costs to parents in Ireland are one of the highest in the OECD, there is a need to address affordability and quality at the same time.

The Programme for Government commits to carrying out an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare. This commitment aligns closely with work on the design and development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme which is due to be introduced later this year, and the Department is progressing this work in that context. The review will feed into future policy development, including in relation to levels of payments to services.

The last two budgets delivered a 35% increase each year in funding for childcare. However, it is recognised that there is a need to continue to invest and a strong case will be put forward for more resources in 2018. To go some way towards addressing cost pressures faced by providers in the sector, €10m has been secured to enable providers to be paid for non-contact time, where they will have no children present and they will be able to pay staff to concentrate on administrative workload. Services themselves can decide how to use the payment when it is received.

While my Department is not an employer of childcare workers it is a significant funder of childcare services and very conscious that there is an issue with regard to the pay and conditions of workers in the sector. My Department is engaging with the early years sector, includ-

ing through the National Collaborative Forum for the Early Years Care and Education Sector (The Early Years Forum) to explore how this can be addressed in the short, medium and long term. The Early Years Forum has been established to allow issues of relevance, such as these, to be discussed with key stakeholders. The Forum has enabled consultation and engagement between myself as Minister, key Department of Children and Youth Affairs officials, and key representatives of the sector. I have chaired the first two meetings of the Early Years Forum which has deepened my understanding of the issues facing the Early Years Sector and allowed me to share my vision of the sector moving forward.

Child Care Services Funding

1296. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review the single affordable child care scheme with a view to allowing a subsidy for those in part-time care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12879/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme will provide childcare subsidies for both full-time and part-time childcare, including after-school childcare. While the number of hours of childcare subsidised per week will be capped at a maximum of 40 (or 15 for families in which a parent is neither engaged in work nor in study), it is not intended that there will be any minimum number of hours of childcare for participation in the scheme. Parents availing of subsidies under the scheme – whether for part-time or for full-time childcare – will be subsidised on the basis of the number of hours of childcare per week, with the subsidy per hour determined by the age of the child and the family income. Maximum subsidy-rates, for families with the lowest incomes, will range from €3.76 per hour for school-age childcare to €5.11 per hour for children between 6 and 12 months. Recognising the importance of flexibility to families, arrangements in terms of the numbers of hours per day or days per week of childcare that is used will be a matter for parents to decide, depending on the childcare options available to them locally.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme will provide a system from which both universal and targeted subsidies can be provided towards the cost of childcare.

The universal element of the Scheme will be available to all families with children between the age of 6 months and 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the free pre-school programme if later than 36 months). The targeted element of the scheme will involve a progressive system of income-related subsidies for parents with children between 6 months and 15 years, with eligibility based on net parental income. A family may receive either the universal or the targeted subsidy per eligible child, not both. The subsidy provided will be whichever of the universal and targeted payment is most favourable to a family.

Child Care Services Staff

1297. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding early years education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12920/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that staff in the childcare sector have a critical role to play in delivering high quality childcare services and that they deserve to be valued and respected for the important role they play with our children. Because childcare costs to parents in Ireland are one of the highest in the OECD, there is a need to address affordability and qual-

ity at the same time.

The Programme for Government commits to carrying out an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare. This commitment aligns closely with work on the design and development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme which is due to be introduced later this year, and the Department is progressing this work in that context. The review will feed into future policy development, including in relation to levels of payments to services.

The last two budgets delivered a 35% increase each year in funding for childcare. However, it is recognised that there is a need to continue to invest and a strong case will be put forward for more resources in 2018. To go some way towards addressing cost pressures faced by providers in the sector, €10m has been secured to enable providers to be paid for non-contact time, where they will have no children present and they will be able to pay staff to concentrate on administrative workload. Services themselves can decide how to use the payment when it is received.

While the Department is not an employer of childcare workers it is a significant funder of childcare services and very conscious that there is an issue with regard to the pay and conditions of workers in the sector. It is engaging with the early years sector to explore how this can be addressed in the short, medium and long term.

Child Care Services Funding

1298. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the financial supports available to parents that return to work regarding child care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13246/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department currently provides childcare funding under the following programmes:

1. Early Years Care and Education (ECCE):

The ECCE programme provides free pre-school three hours per day, five days per week. From September 2016 children are eligible to start free pre-school once they turn 3 (and are not more than 4 years and 8 months), and can continue in free pre-school until they start primary school (once the child is not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the relevant pre-school year i.e. end June). Children are able to enrol in free pre-school at three different points in the year - September, January and April - so that they can access free pre-school as soon as possible after they reach the age of 3. Prior to Budget 2016, families benefitted from 38 weeks of free pre-school. This has now been increased to 61 weeks on average (ranging from 51 weeks to 88 weeks). It has been estimated that this 61 weeks of ECCE reduces parents childcare costs by €4,000 (per child).

2. Community Childcare Subvention (CCS):

The CCS Programme provides support for parents on various social protection payments, in low paid employment, and training or education, by enabling qualifying parents to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community childcare services. A childcare funding subsidy is provided to childcare services and the parent pays the remainder of the services childcare fee. CCS is available through participating community not-for-profit childcare services and is also available through participating private providers through the CCS Private programme. The maximum subsidisation/payment per child, per week, is €95.00 (to be deducted from the weekly childcare fee).

3. Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Programmes:

The objective of the TEC Programmes is to support parents on eligible training courses and eligible categories of parents returning to work, by providing subsidised childcare places. The TEC programmes are;

3.1. Childcare Education and Training Support programme (CETS). The CETS Programme formerly catered for FAS and VEC training course participants and now provides childcare on behalf of the Local Education and Training Boards.

3.2. After-School Child Care programme (ASCC). The ASCC is administered on behalf of the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and provides afterschool care for primary school children for certain categories of working parents and parents on DSP employment programmes (not including Community Employment).

3.3. Community Employment Childcare programme (CEC). The CEC is administered on behalf of DSP and provides childcare for children of parents who are participating on Community Employment schemes.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) is due to be introduced later this year. It will subsume and replace all existing childcare programmes mentioned above, with the exception of the ECCE Programme, and will have both a universal and a targeted element. The universal element of the scheme will cater for all children between the ages of 6 to 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the free pre-school programme if later) who are availing of childcare by a Tusla registered childcare service. The targeted element of the scheme will cater for children aged from 6 months to 15 years. This element of the scheme will be means tested and will be based on a parent's net income. This will be a progressive system that ensures that those on the lower end of the income scale will receive the greatest subsidy. I will be publishing information on this Scheme in the coming months.

It would be advisable for parents returning to work to contact DSP in relation to financial supports, if any, that they may be entitled to avail of from that Department.

In addition, parents may find it of value to contact their local City and County Childcare Committee for further information.

Child Care Services Staff

1299. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration will be given to the circumstances of a person (details supplied) who now falls outside of the criteria outlined in the early years preschool regulations and her Department's child care programmes qualification requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13254/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 are designed to address fundamental quality issues within early years services. They provide that each employee working directly with children attending a service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or a qualification deemed to be equivalent. The Regulations state that each service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard. This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for new services registering after that date, and for all other services it took effect on 31st December 2016.

My Department introduced this regulatory change following many years of consideration and consultation with the sector. Notwithstanding that the requirements set out in the Regulations were well flagged for the past number of years, and mindful of the challenge that it would present to the sector, the Department introduced the following supportive measures:

a) Learner Funds to provide sector workers with an opportunity to upskill to a Level 5 qualification.

b) A qualifications assessment procedure, put in place by DCYA in the latter half of 2015, allows for applications to be made for individual qualifications assessment. This is conducted by DCYA in consultation with the Early Years Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills, and is available to anyone who applies. Each application is dealt with on a case by case basis.

c) The Regulations provide an exemption for certain existing childcare staff who intended to retire from the sector in the near future, did not hold the minimum qualification and who did not wish to undertake a course of training at that stage. The Regulations stipulate that persons seeking to avail of this exemption had to, by 30th June 2016, have signed the necessary declaration and be in possession of a letter from the Minister confirming that the exemption had been granted.

It is my understanding that the person in question submitted an application to the qualifications assessment procedure, at b) above, and based on the documentation submitted it was deemed that they did not meet the minimum qualification requirement.

In conclusion, staff who have completed a relevant award at NFQ Level 5 or above by the 31st December 2016, or who were granted an exemption before the 30th June 2016, will meet the regulatory standard. Staff who are currently undergoing education to achieve a Level 5 award will not meet the regulatory standard until that award has been achieved.

Departmental Bodies Board Remuneration

1300. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will confirm that in line with the one person-one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of her Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and if any such remuneration is being paid that such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13336/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm to the Deputy that in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant that is a member of a State board or agency under the control of my Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Schools Amalgamation

1301. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has been notified of changes in circumstances in a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13408/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The change in circumstances referred to by the Deputy relates to an amalgamation of three schools namely: Vocational School Kildare, St. Joseph's Academy and Presentation Secondary School, into one

new school namely: Kildare Town Community School.

Vocational School Kildare and St. Joseph's Academy had DEIS status prior to the amalgamation. However, the new school, Kildare Town Community School, does not have DEIS status. The Department of Education and Skills informed the amalgamating schools that the new school would be given interim DEIS status until August 2017. This was to ensure that all pupils joining the new school from the amalgamated schools with DEIS status would continue to have DEIS supports until they completed their schooling.

Question No. 1302 answered with Question No. 1293.

Youth Services Funding

1303. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding arrangements for a group (details supplied) post July 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13570/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Youngballymun receives funding from my Department under the Area Based childhood (ABC) Programme. The ABC Programme is a prevention and early intervention initiative led by my Department. It is a time-bound, co-funding arrangement in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies for the period 2013 to 2017. The aim of the ABC Programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families living in poverty in 13 areas of disadvantage, and to help break the cycle of child poverty in areas where it has become entrenched.

The ABC Programme was preceded by the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007-2013) in which three sites participated: Youngballymun, Preparing For Life (Dublin Northside), and the Childhood Development Initiative Tallaght. Youngballymun received €15 million as a participant in the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme. The total original funding for Youngballymun under the ABC programme was €5 million bringing the total funding received by Youngballymun under both programmes to €20 million.

Owing to their earlier transition into the ABC programme, Youngballymun and the other two PEIP sites were contracted to deliver services in their areas until mid-2016. In July of 2016 my Department, and co-funder The Atlantic Philanthropies, furnished additional funding to Youngballymun of €500,000 to enable the organisation to extend its service provision for a further year, to end-July 2017, bringing their total budget under the ABC Programme to €5.5 million.

In late 2016 my Department secured additional funding of €4.5 million, which is to be used to ensure that all 13 of the existing ABC sites are to remain in contract to the end of December 2017. This brings the total investment in the ABC Programme for the period 2013-2017 to €34.2 million. We are currently working with ABC programme managers to identify the full running costs for each site to end of December 2017. Furthermore, it is the intention of my Department to seek additional funding in this year's estimates process to support the ABC programme to end August 2018. A communication was recently sent to the ABC site managers in this regard.

My Department and The Atlantic Philanthropies are securing this extension of funding to bring the existing programme closer in line with the expected timeline for delivery of the national evaluation report in 2018. My Department will utilise the learnings emerging from the programme, and the findings from the national evaluation, to inform the design of prevention

and early intervention initiatives that comprehend the Programme for Government commitments.

I look forward to the continued engagement of Youngballymun, and all other ABC sites with my Department as we work towards the implementation of quality prevention and early intervention initiatives in order to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout the country.

Child Care Services Staff

1304. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if early years practitioners working in Government-funded early years settings are entitled to claim flat rate expenses in the same manner as teachers from primary to tertiary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13617/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): While my Department is a significant funder of childcare services in Ireland it is not an employer of childcare workers. The question in relation to flat rate expenses for childcare practitioners would therefore be an issue for discussion by childcare practitioners with the childcare providers who are their employers.

Adoption Legislation

1305. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the constitutional right to privacy of the birth parent will be affected by the commencement of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016. [13739/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill provides a statutory basis for the provision of information related to both past and future adoptions. One of the key provisions in this Bill is to give an adopted person, aged 18 years or over who was adopted prior to its commencement, a statutory entitlement to the information required to apply for their birth certificate or a copy of his/her adoption order. In order to legislate for the right to identity for adopted persons and for the Bill to be legally sound, it must balance this right with the birth parents' right to privacy. The following suite of measures are provided for in the Bill to ensure that the birth parents' right to privacy is protected:

- enabling a birth parent to register his or her name on the Register of Adoption Contact Enquiries and to express his or her contact preferences;

- notifying a birth parent (whose name is entered on Register) in advance of the proposed release of birth certificate information and providing that parent with an opportunity to provide the Agency with a statement setting out his or her view that there are 'compelling reasons' as to why the information should not be released;

- providing that where Tusla considers that there are compelling reasons, it will refer the matter to the Circuit Court for determination;

- providing that, where a birth parent has not registered his or her name on the Register or has registered a 'no contact' preference on the Register, an adopted person will be required to give an undertaking that he or she will not contact his or her birth parent;

- offering support and guidance to both parties.

Additionally, an awareness campaign will be undertaken during the first six months after commencement, to alert the relevant persons to the provisions of the legislation and to the intention to release information to enable an adopted person to obtain his or her birth certificate or a copy of his or her adoption order.

Youth Services Funding

1306. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is grant aid available to a scout group (detail supplied) to assist it in acquiring some land or the use of some land to further its activities. [13802/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department provides a range of funding schemes, programmes and supports to the youth sector. The funding available from my Department is to support the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, by the voluntary youth work sector. My Department does not provide funding for organisations to purchase land.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups, including to local Scout groups, through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to some youth groups across almost all ETB areas and the 11th Cork Scout Group may wish to make an application for funding.

In 2017, almost €1.2m has been allocated to this scheme, a 10% increase over 2016. The scheme, which is open to new entrants, will be advertised locally and applications for funding are invited by the ETBs from local groups in their respective areas. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. Cork ETB will be advertising the scheme on their website over the coming months.

Youth Services Funding

1307. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on her visit (details supplied); the assurances she gave during the visit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13816/17]

1309. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on her visit to a community centre (details supplied); the detail of the assurances she gave during the visit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13960/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1307 and 1309 together.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

Budget 2017 provided an additional €5.5m in current funding to my Department to support

the provision of youth services. This will bring the total youth funding in 2017 to €57.4m. This additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department has notified national organisations of their 2017 allocations in the past month.

Fettercairn Community and Youth Project is funded under my Department's Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund. This fund was established by the Government in 1998 to assist in the development of preventative strategies in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities, including sports and recreational facilities, and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop. In 2017 this project received an allocation of €49,718, an increase of 5% over its 2016 allocation.

I was delighted to visit Fettercairn Community Centre, which hosts Fettercairn Community and Youth Project on 8th March. During my visit I met with representatives of the youth service and with the wider community. I was pleased to assure those present of my continued support for the provision of youth services, into the future.

Foster Care

1308. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the volume of cases handled by the Irish foster care association for 2016 has seen a substantial increase in calls from Waterford; her views on the fact that the highest volume of calls from Waterford relate to allegations and child protection concerns; her plans to address the fact that 62% of the concerns expressed relate to poor communications with social workers; if she is satisfied that concerns from families providing foster care are being dealt with adequately; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13836/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that officials from my Department are in regular contact with representatives from the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA). Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, also holds regular meetings with the Association. Early in 2016, the issue of an increase in calls to the support line relating to the Waterford area was highlighted during the course of these meetings. Senior management from Tusla met with members of the Irish Foster Care Association and explored the issues. It was also noted that each contact was recorded and that one issue could generate a number of calls. It was agreed that concerns raised would be followed up within the relevant teams. As a result of measures taken there was a significant reduction in calls relating to the area in question. In March 2016, 11.3% of the overall average of calls related to this area but this stood at 0% of the national average at December, 2016.

The issue of allegations and child protection concerns was also explored and it was noted, at the time, that a small number of serious allegations were under investigation. These were contributing to the statistics for calls to the IFCA support line. The issues were resolved locally and supported by the positive working relationships of Tusla and the Irish Foster Care Association.

Since the beginning of 2017, IFCA has reported that contacts to the support line relating to the Waterford area represents 1.9% of the overall total contacts and that no specific trends have been identified.

Senior staff with specific responsibility for fostering services in the Waterford area works in partnership with foster carers to support them in their caring role. They meet biannually with IFCA and approximately every eight weeks with the local Tusla Fostering Strategic working group. This working group is comprised of foster carers and social work staff and works col-

laboratively on service improvement planning and responding to concerns as they arise.

Question No. 1309 answered with Question No. 1307.

Youth Services Funding

1310. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is funding available through her Department for a one-off build for new premises for a play group (details supplied); if funding can be sought for such a project through alternative sources; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13970/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department provides funding under the following schemes:

The Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation provides for new and existing play and recreation facilities for children and young people. Projects may include new facilities, equipment, designs and/or the utilisation of non-traditional play spaces or the refurbishment or upgrading of existing play and recreation spaces and facilities.

Applications to this Scheme can be made through the Local Authority in which the facility/equipment will be available. Matched funding is a requirement of the Scheme and can be in the form of funds raise by voluntary groups, or a Local Authority contribution of finance or 'in kind' funding. The Local Authority Play and Recreation Network member for county Donegal is Eamon Boyle <eamonb@donegalcoco.ie>. It should be noted that the funding criteria under this scheme requires that facilities for which funding is granted are available for use by all children and young people in the locality at times when they are free to use them i.e. outside of school hours. The total amount of funding available in 2017 is €250,000. A maximum grant of €20,000 will be allocated to each Local Authority.

In relation to the Early Years Capital programme for 2017, yesterday I announced that funding will be made available under this programme in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: New Places (€3 million total available – maximum €50,000 per grant);

- Strand 2: Building improvements and maintenance/refurbishment (€500,000 total available, maximum €20,000 per grant, Community childcare services only);

- Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area (€500,000 total available, maximum €5,000 per grant).

Pobal will be responsible for administering the programme on behalf of my Department. Further details and information on how to make an application for funding will be available shortly on the Pobal website www.pobal.ie.

Additionally, at the recent launch of the Action Plan for School Age Childcare I announced a separate €3 million in capital funding for services providing school age childcare. This capital scheme will open in April and will encourage expansion in the number of school age childcare places along with enhancements to quality.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

1311. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 815 of 28 February 2017, if the specific issue of the initial non-

response of Tusla to the complaint lodged by a person (details supplied) to them will be explained. [14052/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has confirmed that the Social Work team in the local area reviewed and followed up on the concerns raised and continues to work with the family.

Departmental Staff Data

1312. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 463 of 23 February 2017, if she will provide details with regard to the seven members of staff currently suspended in Tusla, in tabular form (details supplied). [14061/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to inform the Deputy that the suspension of staff and associated details are an operational matter for Tusla.

Departmental Legal Costs

1313. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total amount spent externally by her Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to her Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14127/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy might note that no expenditure was incurred directly by my Department since 2015 for the provision of services in respect of legal advice.

School Discipline

1314. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on policies on the appropriate usage, utilisation and measure of forced absence sanctions or punishments, suspensions and expulsions at second level school should be. [14203/17]

1315. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the relevant departmental sections and State agencies charged with overseeing and managing the employment and implementation of forced absence punishments or sanctions, suspensions and expulsions at second level and that are charged with examining and correcting any evident overuse at individual school level. [14204/17]

1316. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will examine summary information concerning forced absence sanction or punishments at a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14205/17]

1317. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the inquiries and investigations she will initiate further to summary information concerning forced absence sanction and punishments at a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14207/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1314 to 1317, inclusive, together.

The Educational Welfare Service of Tusla has advised that when it notes excessive numbers of expulsions or suspensions it can write to the School's Board of Management to offer support with a view to reducing these numbers. However, it is a matter for the School Board as to whether they accept this offer of assistance and the Educational Welfare Service does not have the authority to impose any sanctions if the school does not wish to engage. Disciplinary policy in a particular school is a matter for the Board of Management for that school. The Educational Welfare Service provides guidelines on producing codes of behaviour but cannot impose any sanctions on schools who disregard same.

In relation to the school in question, Tusla has advised that it has written to the school to offer supports and as yet has not received a response. It is important to note that any further action which may be taken in relation to this particular school is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Ministerial Allowances

1318. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under her remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14562/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that no Minister for this Department has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. There has been no Minister of State in this Department.

Defence Forces Remuneration

1319. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the savings that accrued to the Exchequer from the cuts to the Defence Forces personnel made under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009 to 2015 and the public service stability agreement 2013 to 2018, in tabular form; and the further savings arising from the incorporation of duties attracting technical group 1 pay into standard duties for new enlisted personnel. [13047/17]

1320. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the savings to the Exchequer that accrued from cuts to Defence Force personnel to the flat rate security duty allowance and related payments paid at the standard weekday rate, the 10% reduction in certain Defence Forces allowances, the voluntary buy-out of Border duty allowance for enlisted personnel and the implementation of additional incremental points in pay scales for new enlisted personnel post 1 July 2013 in tabular form. [13048/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Question Nos. 1319 and 1320 together.

As there are various factors which would impact in calculating the estimated costings in the manner sought by the Deputy, such as the level of recruitment which varies over time and the numbers of recruits remaining in the Permanent Defence Force once recruited, can change as well, I am not in a position to provide the costing in the format sought.

Naval Service Vessels

1321. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on a matter with regard to a vessel being named after a person (details supplied). [13262/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper provides for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel which will be enabled for helicopter operations and will also have a freight carrying capacity. It is the Government's intent that this new vessel will provide a flexible and adaptive capability for a wide range of maritime tasks, both at home and overseas.

The full range of specific roles and capabilities of the new vessel will be considered in detail by the Defence organisation when preparing the vessel design specification before going to the market as part of the White Paper implementation process.

The question of the naming of the new vessel will be considered when the vessel build is under way.

Civil Defence

1322. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will address concerns that members of the Civil Defence can no longer assist gardaí with assisting in road traffic management; the current situation with regard to this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14188/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Civil Defence is a statutory volunteer based organisation which supports the frontline emergency services. It operates in partnership between the Department of Defence and local authorities' through-out Ireland. The Department of Defence is charged with the strategic management and development of Civil Defence at national level. At local level, Civil Defence is based in each local authority area under the operational control of the relevant local authority. On a day to day basis these Units operate under the control of a Civil Defence Officer (CDO). The CDO is a full-time employee of the local authority and is responsible for the day-to-day management of Civil Defence matters under the overall direction of the Chief Executive of the local authority.

The White Paper on Defence (2015) establishes the priority task for Civil Defence as emergency support to the Principal Response Agencies (an Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and local authorities). This embraces the large number of support roles under the Framework for Major Emergency Management which includes providing assisting in dealing with a wide range of emergencies at national and local level, including severe weather, flooding and searches for missing persons.

The day-to-day operational management of local Civil Defence units is the responsibility of the relevant local authority in which the unit is based. In this context, it is a matter for each local authority to determine the type and the level of support that can be provided in response to any request for assistance, including an Garda Síochána in road traffic management. In making this determination, the local authority will take a wide range of factors into consideration including the availability of volunteers, the nature of the task, whether those volunteers are trained and equipped to safely undertake the task and the competing demands for Civil Defence support at the time the request is received.

Defence Forces Personnel

1323. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress that has been made in developing the role of women in peacekeeping functions, as has been highlighted by the Secretary General of the UN and identified under UNSCR 1325; and the status of the engagement with other stakeholders, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána, to explore the contribution of gender-focused measures, particularly regarding the appropriate deployment of female personnel. [12819/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In May 2015, during a visit to Ireland, the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon, observed the value in some situations of being able to call upon female peacekeepers having regard to the multifaceted nature of peacekeeping challenges. He requested that consideration be given to the contribution of women soldiers to UN operations and that Ireland might factor this into its approach to such operations. The 2015 White Paper on Defence highlights the importance of UNSCR 1325 in setting out the vital role that women can play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace building, post-conflict reconstruction, reform and governance. A number of projects have been identified to give effect to these commitments and work has recently commenced in my Department to this end which will require in due course engagement with other stakeholders involved, such as the UN, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána to further explore the contribution of gender focused measures, particularly in relation to the appropriate formation and deployment of female personnel. The advancement of the Women Peace and Security agenda in peacekeeping operations is an area in which Ireland has taken a proactive role. In preparing contingents for overseas operations, significant training is provided on gender to all Defence Forces personnel. Moreover, a gender perspective is included in the planning and conduct of all overseas military operations, something that is particularly relevant in circumstances where gender based violence has occurred. It is important to stress that the Government remains committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and that the Defence Forces have no restrictions as regards the assignment of men or women to the full range of operational and administrative duties, including in respect of participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

In 2016, at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial held in London, which I attended, one of the main issues discussed was improving peacekeeping, including increasing the involvement of women at all levels in overseas missions. I contributed to the session on the participation of women in peace and security outlining actions currently undertaken by Ireland in that area and confirming our commitment to increase the participation of women at senior decision-making and leadership levels in the Irish defence forces.

The Deputy will also be aware that Ireland recently appointed the first female officer to the position of Officer Commanding an Irish Defence Forces contingent on an overseas mission. It is also the case that four officers serving with UNIFIL, UNDOF, MONUSCO and EUTM Mali have gender advisor roles in their briefs.

Cyber Security Policy

1324. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to address the increased threats to the State from cyberattacks and terrorism as identified in the Government's White Paper on Defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[12820/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As outlined in the Governments White Paper on Defence 2015, Cyber attacks have very significant implications for governmental administration, for industry, for economic well-being and for the security and safety of citizens. The response to cyber threats remains a whole-of-Government challenge, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment having the lead role. The primary focus of the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces will remain the protection of Defence networks. The Defence Forces have two personnel seconded to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment's Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT-IE) on an ongoing basis. In addition, as in any emergency situation, once Defence systems are supported, the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces will provide support to CSIRT-IE, in so far as resources allow. A Service Level Agreement is currently being developed in relation to such supports to CSIRT.

In relation to terrorism, primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. In that regard, among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence 2015 is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces cooperate fully with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána in this context.

Air Corps Equipment

1325. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to equip the Air Corps with fighter jets that are capable of defending Irish airspace; and if he has considered leasing options similar to the Czech-Swedish contract for aircraft (details supplied). [12821/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The principal aim over the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence will be to ensure that the Air Corps can continue to undertake required military operations and to deliver a broad range of air supports to other Government Departments and agencies in line with Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements.

The future equipment priorities for the Air Corps as set out in the White Paper recognises that there are several new and/or enhanced platforms to be procured for the Air Corps. Future capability requirements for the Air Corps are being considered as part of the capability development and equipment planning priorities process as envisaged in the White Paper. This planning process will define ongoing and future equipment priorities having regard to the evolving security environment and available funding.

In the context of the Air Corps fleet, this will include the replacement of the Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The preparatory work for the tender competition has begun within the Defence organisation, and it is expected that the competition will be initiated shortly.

There are no current plans, however, to upgrade or replace the current fleet of PC-9M aircraft purchased in 2004. The fleet of PC-9M aircraft is expected to fall due for replacement in 2025. The Pilatus PC 9M aircraft were obtained as trainer aircraft for the purpose of training pilots in the Air Corps. It should be noted that a decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft which was lost in 2009 in a tragic accident. The replacement PC-9M aircraft is sched-

uled for delivery later this year from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland at a cost of €5m plus VAT. It will bring the fleet of PC-9M aircraft up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

The PC-9M aircraft are capable of being armed and as such have a limited defensive capability. However, these limitations were noted in the White Paper on Defence and the development of a more capable combat/ intercept capability is to be considered in due course as part of the White Paper review process.

Defence Forces Recruitment

1326. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide a progress report on increases to personnel in the Army, Air Corps, Naval Service and Reserve to meet the proposals in the White Paper on Defence. [12822/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The 2015 White Paper on Defence commits to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Forces at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. As at 28 February 2017 the strength of the Permanent Defence Forces stands at 9,070 (Whole Time Equivalent) i.e. 7293 Army, 701 Air Corps and 1,076 Naval Service personnel. With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, it is intended to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force, recruitment continues to take place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. In total 590 General Service Recruits (501 Army. 89 Navy) were inducted in 2016, along with 100 Cadets between all services. To date in 2017, 106 General Service Recruits (103 Army and 3 Navy) and 10 Air Corps Trainee Military Aircraft Technicians have been inducted.

Recruitment campaigns are continuing at the present time and this year the Defence Forces are planning for the induction of 860 new entrants, the majority of whom will be drawn from 2017 Recruitment Competitions.

It is expected that the following competitions will be launched in Spring 2017: Army Cadetship, Army Equitation Cadetship, Army Engineer Cadetship, Air Corps Cadetship, Naval Service Operations Cadetship, Naval Service Marine Engineer Cadetship, Naval Service Electrical Engineer Cadetship, Air Corps Trainee Military Aircraft Technician, Army General Service Recruits, and Naval Service General Service Recruits.

The 2015 White Paper on Defence commits to maintaining the strength of the Reserve Defence Forces at 4,169 personnel, comprising of 3,869 Army Reserve and 300 Naval Service Reserve. The effective strength of the RDF as of 28 Feb 2017 stands at 1,970. It is anticipated that the next RDF recruitment campaign will commence in the second half of 2017, however, until then the RDF will continue to induct from the 2015/2016 panel, subject to the applicant satisfying all induction criteria.

Defence Forces Recruitment

1327. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated costs needed to restore Defence Force personnel to the levels prior to the cuts that resulted from the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009 to 2015 and

the public service stability agreement 2013-2018, the Lansdowne Road agreement. [12823/17]

1329. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost to the Exchequer should the 10% cut to new entrants to the military be restored. [12840/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Question Nos. 1327 and 1329 together.

There are various factors which would impact in calculating the estimated costings in the manner sought by the Deputy. These include the level of recruitment which varies over time and the numbers of recruits remaining in the Permanent Defence Force once recruited. As both of these are variable, I am not in a position to provide the costing in the format sought. The Deputy may wish to note that Paragraph 2.31 of that Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) provides that in order to address the imbalance between those who entered the Public Service since 2011 and those who entered before that date, revised incremental salary scales shall be prepared for same grade entrants to each public service sector as necessary to incorporate the revision of salary scales introduced by Government Decision in January 2011.Following discussions with the Public Sector Unions the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform issued guidelines dated 30 January 2014, on merging the 01 January 2011 and 01 January 2010 (10% reduction) public service recruitment pay scales.

The new scales were effective from 1 November 2013 and applied to both existing staff on the 2010 pay scale and those who were on the 2011 pay scale.

In order to be of assistance, I attach copies of the recruitment pay scales from 1 January onwards which illustrates the movement of payscales.

NEW ENTRANTS SALARY SCALES

1.

Salary Scale wef 01/01/2010			
	Basic Pay	MSA	Total Weekly
Private G1/NS 3rd Class	€371.15	€0.00	€371.15
Private 2 */NS 2nd Class	€455.70	€41.57	€497.27
0-3 Years Service	€474.86	€41.57	€516.43
Over 3 years service	€491.82	€115.43	€607.25
over 4 years service	€504.79	€115.43	€620.22
over 5 years service	€517.71	€115.43	€633.14
over 6 years service	€553.80	€115.43	€669.23

2.

Salary Scale wef 01/01/2011 (application of 10% reduction for new entrants)			
	Basic Pay	MSA	Total Weekly

Private G1/NS 3rd Class	€334.04	€0.00	€334.04
Private 2 */NS 2nd Class	€410.00	€37.41	€447.41
0-3 Years Service	€427.37	€37.41	€464.78
Over 3 years service	€442.64	€103.89	€546.53
over 4 years service	€454.31	€103.89	€558.20
over 5 years service	€465.94	€103.89	€569.83
over 6 years service	€498.42	€103.89	€602.31

3.

Salary scale wef 01/07/2013 Annex 2 of HRA , for new entrants			
Points	Basic Pay	MSA	Total Weekly
Private G1/NS 3rd Class	€334.04	€0.00	€334.04
Private 2 */NS 2nd Class	€360.00	€0.00	€360.00
1	€360.00	€37.41	€397.41
2	€385.00	€37.41	€422.41
3	€385.00	€65.00	€450.00
4	€410.00	€65.00	€475.00
5	€410.00	€103.89	€513.89
6	€440.00	€103.89	€543.89
7	€470.00	€103.89	€573.89
8	€498.22	€103.89	€602.11
9	€498.22	€103.89	€602.11

4.

Existing - merged pay scale from 1/11/13			
wef 01/11/13 (clause 2.31 of HRA) (merging of 01/01/2010 & 01/01/2011)			Merged salary scale
Points	Basic Pay	MSA	Total Weekly
Private G1/NS 3rd Class	€352.60	€0.00	€352.60
Private 2 */NS 2nd Class	€432.92	€41.57	€474.49
0-3 Years Service	€448.48	€41.57	€490.05
Over 3 years service	€454.30	€115.43	€569.73
over 4 years service	€474.86	€115.43	€590.29
over 5 years service	€491.82	€115.43	€607.25

Existing - merged pay scale from 1/11/13			
wef 01/11/13 (clause 2.31 of HRA) (merging of 01/01/2010 & 01/01/2011)			Merged salary scale
over 6 years service	€504.79	€115.43	€620.22
over 7 years service	€517.71	€115.43	€633.14
over 8 years service	€553.80	€115.43	€669.23

Note - For avoidance of doubt and for comparator purposes the 5.26% adjustor (Single Pension) has not

been applied to the Post Jan 2013 payscales

Defence Forces Strength

1328. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide a comparative breakdown of Defence Force personnel from 2009, prior to the introduction of cuts arising from the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009 to 2015 and the public service stability agreement 2013-2018, the Lansdowne Road agreement, with current levels. [12836/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following a comprehensive review of expenditure commenced in 2011 , the Government decided to stabilise the strength ceiling of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) at 9,500 personnel. A major reorganisation of the Defence Forces was initiated, encompassing the consolidation of three under-strength Army Brigades into two full-strength Brigades. The decision to reorganise the Defence Forces was not motivated by the requirement to achieve direct savings. The purpose of the reorganisation was to maximise the operational capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the Defence Forces within the available resource envelope.

I can confirm that at 31 December 2009 the strength of the Permanent Defence Forces was 9,906 and at 28 February 2017 the strength was 9,070.

Question No. 1329 answered with Question No. 1327.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

1330. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 48 of 9 November 2016, if he considers the development of the potential side effects of mefloquine, listed in the boxed warning, to be either minor and tolerable or intolerable (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12849/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The choice of medication for overseas deployment, including the use of Lariam, is a medical decision made by Medical Officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces. The Defence Forces are aware of the range of reported side effects attaching to all anti-malarial medications. Significant precautions are taken by the Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of

members of the Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications, including identification of any contraindications and assessment of any reported side effects that may occur. While overseas, all personnel have access to either an Irish military Medical Officer or to the UN provided medical service (depending on the particular mission) to whom they could report any complaints, including potential side effects of any medications.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

1331. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number and ranks of the Defence Forces personnel who served in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015; and the duration of their posting. [12967/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Members of the Permanent Defence Force serve in a number of missions in Africa. In 2015, Defence Forces personnel served in the following missions in sub-Saharan Africa: **UNOCI** (United Nations Mission in Ivory Coast)

MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

EUTM Mali (EU-Led Training Mission in Mali).

The average duration of a tour of duty by Irish personnel in the above missions is six (6) months. With the exception of one officer who served for seven months with UNOCI, all deployments to the missions in sub-Saharan Africa, in 2015, were of six months duration or less.

A breakdown of personnel by rank and mission who served for a period of time during the course of 2015 is outlined in the following table:

Rank	MONUSCO	EUTM Mali	UNOCI	Total
Lieutenant Colonel	1		4	5
Commandant	5		2	7
Captain	5			5
Company Sergeant		2		2
Company Quartermaster Sergeant		1		1
Sergeant		11		11
Corporal		1		1
Total	11	15	6	32

Defence Forces Recruitment

1332. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost to the Exchequer of returning the Reserve Defence Forces to pre-2009 levels. [13044/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the military authorities that in 2008, the establishment for the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF) was 9,692. The establishment for the RDF is now 4,069. The White Paper on Defence 2015

allows for an increase of 100 personnel in the Naval Service Reserve, revising the overarching establishment of the RDF is 4,169.

The following table was provided in response to PQ No. 11630/17 and is indicative of costs of meeting Paid Training requirements for notional increases in RDF numbers.

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

The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Reserve Defence Force at or near the establishment figure as set out in the White Paper. Providing for numbers beyond the current establishment would require a reappraisal of the associated organisational structures, levels, and costs of the PDF support required and such a re-appraisal is not envisaged.

Defence Forces Remuneration

1333. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of restoring retrospectively the weekly €50 increase for members of the Army Ranger wing back to 2006 as awarded by the adjudicator under the conciliation and arbitration scheme in 2010. [13045/17]

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.

As the Army Ranger Wing is the Special Operations Force of the Defence Forces the exact number of personnel in it or their location is not released into the public domain, for reasons of operational security. In addition, factors such as the level of recruitment into the ARW and the numbers serving can vary over time which would impact in calculating the estimated costings in the manner sought by the Deputy. In the circumstances, I am not in a position to provide the costing in the format sought.

Defence Forces Remuneration

1334. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost to the Exchequer if the €20 cut to the 24-hour duty payment to Defence Forces personnel was reinstated. [13046/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are various factors which would impact in calculating the estimated costings in the manner sought by the Deputy. These include the numbers of serving soldiers falling eligible for such an allowance and the number of duties undertaken. As these variables can change over time I am not in a position to provide the costing in the format sought.

Defence Forces Funding

1335. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide an incremental breakdown of the cuts that have been imposed on the Defence Forces since 2010. [13050/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in the Defence Force have traditionally been set by reference to relative levels of pay across the various sectors of the Irish public sector. The Deputy will be aware that the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2015 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement) currently define the pay policy for public servants.

In this regard I have set out below a list of measures which have impacted and reduced pay and allowances since 2010 for members of the Permanent Defence Forces.

- Provisions of the Financial Emergency in the Public Interest (No.2) Act 2009,

- Government decision to reduce new entrants pay and allowances by 10%,

- Government decision regarding the review of Public Service Allowance and Premium Payments to eliminate certain allowances and elimination of certain allowances for new beneficiaries,

- Provision of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 (The Haddington Road Agreement).

The Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC), announced by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has been tasked with providing objective analysis and advice on the most appropriate pay levels for the public service, including the Defence Forces. The Public Service Pay Commission is expected to report in the coming months. Once this report is available, the Government intends to initiate negotiations on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations. Future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will be dealt with within this process.

Protected Disclosures

1336. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Defence Forces regulations as they currently stand allow for military personnel to contact the Health and Safety Authority directly. [13271/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that

I amended Defence Forces Regulations so that they would meet the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. For the purposes of the Act, all members of the Permanent Defence Force and the Reserve Defence Force are deemed to be workers. A protected disclosure can be made by a worker in a number of ways including to a person prescribed to be a recipient of a protected disclosure. The Chief Executive Officer of the Health and Safety Authority is such a recipient.

Defence Forces Equipment

1337. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if technical personnel in the Army and Air Corps are permitted to bring home issue overalls and other uniform clothing that have been potentially contaminated with toxic chemicals; and if he and or the Defence Forces have considered the possible contamination risk that poses whereby these items of work clothing may come into contact with items in the home. [13272/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the Military Authorities that disposable coveralls are provided to personnel if an activity involves risk of contamination from toxic chemicals. I am advised that these coveralls are disposed of, immediately after use, using a chemical waste contract.

I am also informed that the Defence Forces policy on personal protective equipment (PPE) states that "personnel shall be provided with the necessary training and information on the use of the PPE." The policy makes it clear that personnel must use the personal protective equipment correctly and whenever it is required, they must participate in any training or instruction provided on the fitting, use and inspection of personal protective equipment and they must look after it and store it in a safe location.

Commemorative Medals

1338. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a person (details supplied) will receive a 1916 Centenary Commemorative medal. [13319/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that it is intended to present the person referred to by the Deputy with the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal at a ceremony for retired members of the 28th Infantry Battalion on Friday, 28th April 2017. Invitations to this event will issue shortly.

Departmental Bodies Board Remuneration

1339. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will confirm that, in line with the one person one salary principle, no public servant who is a member of a State board or agency under the control of his Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees and that, if any such remuneration is being paid, such payment will be discontinued and payments that were wrongfully paid will be reclaimed. [13320/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that no public servant that is a member of a State Board or Agency under the control of my Department is currently in receipt of remuneration in the form of board fees.

Defence Forces Remuneration

1340. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence will make a decision regarding the payment of an Army Ranger wing allowance that was the subject of an arbitration in 2010 (details supplied). [13805/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On 27th 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 Strength

1341. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the most up-to-date figures for the strength of the Permanent Defence Force with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13807/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 28 February 2017, the latest date for which details are available, was 9,070. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force, recruitment continues to take place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. An ambitious recruitment campaign has been launched recently targeting an intake of 860 personnel this year, including general service recruits, apprentices and cadets, across all three services. The following tables set out below, indicate the strength of the Permanent Defence Force as of 28 February across all three services and ranks, broken down by gender. The figures provided are for whole time equivalent posts.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, it is intended to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Army

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant General	1	0	1
Major General	2	0	2
Brigadier General	6	0	6
Colonel	34	1	35
Lieutenant Colonel	96	2	98
Commandant	220	32	252
Captain	217	41	258

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant	146	19	165
Sergeant Major	29	0	29
Battalion Quarter-master Sergeant	31	0	31
Company Sergeant	88	3	91
Company Quarter-master Sergeant	150	3	153
Sergeant	786	54	840
Corporal	1233	113	1346
Private	3711	195	3906
Cadets	66	14	80
Total	6816	477	7293

Air Corps

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1
Colonel	3	0	3
Lieutenant Colonel	12	0	12
Commandant	31	2	33
Captain	43	5	48
Lieutenant	22	0	22
Sergeant Major	6	1	7
Battalion Quarter-master Sergeant	3	0	3
Company Sergeant	55	0	55
Company Quarter-master Sergeant	10	1	11
Sergeant	104	5	109
Corporal	142	9	151
Private	209	9	218
Cadets	27	1	28
Total	668	33	701

Naval Service

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1
Colonel	2	0	2
Lieutenant Colonel	13	0	13
Commandant	42	9	51
Captain	35	14	49
Lieutenant	32	2	34
Sergeant Major	6	0	6
Battalion Quarter-master Sergeant	7	0	7
Company Sergeant	66	0	66

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Company Quarter-master Sergeant	13	0	13
Sergeant	163	7	170
Corporal	123	7	130
Private	493	19	512
Cadets	20	2	22
Total	1016	60	1076

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

1342. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the most up-to-date figures for the strength of the Reserve Defence Forces with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13808/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 28 February 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, the effective strength of the Reserve Defence Force was 1,970, of which 273 are female personnel. Of the 1,970 personnel, 1,856 (251 females) are Army Reservists and 114 (22 females) are Naval Service Reservists. The following table sets out the effective strength of the Reserve Defence Force as of 28 February 2017 broken down by rank and gender of both Army and Naval Service Reservists.

RANK	ARMY RESERV-ISTS (overall numbers)	(Female Army Res. personnel)	NAVAL SERVICE RESERV-ISTS (overall numbers)	(Female NS Res. Personnel)	TOTAL RDF	Total Fe-male RDF Personnel
Lt.Colonel	4	0	0	0	4	0
Comdt	54	2	4	0	58	2
Captain	45	1	5	0	50	1
Lieutenant	191	30	7	1	198	31
Sgt. Major	1	0	0	0	1	0
BQMS	5	0	1	0	6	0
CS	4 7	0	8	0	5 5	0
CQMS	60	3	0	0	60	3
Sergeant	2 5 9	19	9	1	268	20
Corporal	362	68	22	6	384	74
Privates	828	128	58	14	886	142
	1856	251	114	22	1970	273

For the sake of completeness, the table below sets out the current strength figures of the First Line Reserve, as of 28 February 2017, broken down by rank.

FORMATION	OFFICER	NCO	PTE	TOTAL
ARMY	25	10	110	145
AIR CORPS	6	4	19	29

FORMATION	OFFICER	NCO	PTE	TOTAL
NAVAL SERVICE	22	5	54	81
TOTAL	53	19	183	255

The White Paper on Defence (2015) sets out an overall establishment figure of 4,169 for the RDF. Recruitment campaigns are conducted on an annual ongoing basis. The White Paper confirms that the primary role of the Reserve is to augment the PDF in times of crisis and to participate in ceremonial events. The implementation of measures set out in the 2015 White Paper will provide opportunities for certain members of the RDF to undertake new duties. The intention is that this and other White Paper initiatives will be a motivating factor in encouraging more people to join the Reserve.

I believe that the Reserve Defence Force is an important asset to the State. I value the contribution of all of its members who volunteer their time and service so willingly and I am fully committed to its ongoing and future development.

Defence Forces Recruitment

1343. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Defence Forces recruited in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13809/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels.

I am advised by the Military Authorities that a total of 590 General Service Recruits were enlisted into the Permanent Defence Force in 2016, of which 501 Recruits were enlisted in the Army and 89 Recruits were enlisted in the Naval Service. In addition, 98 Cadetships were awarded following the 2016 Cadetship Competitions.

I am further advised that to date in 2017, a total of 106 General Service Recruits have been enlisted, of which 103 Recruits were enlisted in the Army and 3 Recruits were enlisted in the Naval Service. Recruitment will continue in 2017 from the panels formed following the 2016 General Service Recruitment competition, until they are exhausted. In addition, a new General Service Recruitment campaign was launched on 23 February 2017, as part of the Government's commitment to maintain the strength of the Defence Forces at 9,500 personnel. The intake of Cadets into the Permanent Defence Force is normally carried out on an annual basis, taking into consideration the operational requirements of the Defence Forces and the resource envelope allocated to Defence. The 2017 Cadetship competitions will be launched on 22 March 2017. This year Defence Forces are planning to induct 860 new entrants.

Defence Forces Veterans

1344. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide a service medal for members of the Defence Forces that were involved at Jadotville;

if members of the Defence Forces will be acknowledged with a service medal for their tour of duty in the Congo; if retired members of the Defence Forces will be presented with the commemorative medal for 1916; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13842/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The issue of the award of medals to the men of "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion was comprehensively addressed in 1965. A properly constituted Medals Board considered the various cases presented and made a decision that no medals would be awarded. The Chief of Staff of the day considered the decision of the Board and was satisfied with the findings. Subsequently, the question was raised again in a letter to a newly appointed Chief of Staff. He forwarded the letter to the original Medals Board and asked that they reconvene and review their decision. The Board indicated that the issues raised had received due consideration and that they were not prepared to alter their findings. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Siege of Jadotville, I decided to issue a Unit Citation to honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of "A" Company. I organised and hosted a ceremony in Custume Barracks, Athlone on Saturday 17th September 2016 at which a Unit Citation was presented to the Company in recognition of their collective heroism and professional performance during the Siege of Jadotville whilst cut-off from support and reinforcements. During the ceremony I presented a copy of the Citation to each member of the Unit or next-of-kin in the case of deceased members. This was the first time a Unit Citation was awarded within the Defence Forces and I was delighted to be able to formally recognise the brave actions of these men. In addition, a specially commissioned insignia will be provided to the members and the next of kin of deceased members of "A" company in the coming weeks. These are awards that are used internationally by other militaries to recognise those Units that have served with particular distinction.

Recognition of service on UN Peacekeeping missions is made through the awarding of a UN Service Medal. The qualifying criteria for the award of a UN Service Medal were that personnel should have served on the UN mission for 90 days. An inspection of the records for the UN Congo mission in 1961 would indicate that serving personnel received a UN Service Medal on return to their Parent Unit in Ireland dating from 1962.

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. Accordingly, retired members of the Defence Forces are eligible for the Medal if they were in service during 2016. The awarding of the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal is a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann, both Permanent and Reserve, who have served during this centenary year of 2016. The medals were specially commissioned to mark the role the Defence Forces played in the centenary year. It serves to honour the central role of the Defence Forces across all seven strands of the Centenary Programme throughout 2016. They have played an essential role in our national commemorations, whether at the Commemoration at the GPO and the Parade on Easter Sunday, the ceremonies to mark the execution of the Leaders of the Rising or the formal delivery, to primary schools in the State, of our National Flag and a copy of the Proclamation. There are no plans to issue the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to anyone who did not serve in 2016.

Commemorative Medals

1345. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will review an application for a service medal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14108/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Decisions regarding the award of medals in respect of the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence are dependent on verification and corroborative evidence of the service involved. At this remove it can be difficult to obtain such evidence. I have asked for the case of the relevant individual to be examined and officials from the Department will contact the Deputy directly regarding the matter.

Departmental Legal Costs

1346. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the total amount spent externally by his Department on legal advice for each year since 2015; the solicitors firms involved; the barristers, junior and senior, that provided services to his Department for each such year; the amounts paid to each firm or person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14129/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The main requirement for legal services by my Department is in the context of litigation, usually in the form of administrative law and personal injury proceedings. The Chief State Solicitor's Office and the State Claims Agency manage and provide legal representation in relation to all cases taken against the Minister for Defence. In addition while my Department does not engage the services directly it funds the provision of legal aid in respect of Court Marital Appeals Court cases.

Outside of the cases managed by the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the State Claims Agency, a payment of €15,100.49 was made in 2015 in respect of professional legal and advisory services supplied to my Department by a legal representative based in Lebanon.

In addition a payment of €1482.15 including VAT was made in 2016 in respect of legal advice supplied by Anthony Kerr BL on two matters being dealt with by the Defence Forces Conciliation and Arbitration Branch.

Ministerial Allowances

1347. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will confirm that no Minister or Minister of State under his remit since 2011 has claimed overnight expenses for staying in Dublin. [14564/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In the period since February 2011 I have claimed expenses on 11 occasions in respect of accommodation in Dublin. On each of the 11 occasions it was necessary for me to overnight in Dublin as I had an early flight to allow me to undertake work abroad such as meetings at EU level or visits to our troops serving with UNDOF and UNTSO in the Middle East.

There is no record of any other Minister assigned to the Department of Defence in the period since February 2011 claiming overnight expenses for staying in Dublin.