

## **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 8, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **European Defence Action Plan**

9. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Ireland will block progress towards the establishment of a common European fund for military research and co-operation to prevent the further militarisation of the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15486/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The College of Commissioners adopted the European Defence Action Plan on 30 November last. This

Commission proposal has yet to go through the wide ranging and extensive EU procedures before any part of it becomes a reality.

The aim of the Plan is to explore how EU policies and instruments can ensure that the EU's industrial and skills base will be able to deliver required defence capabilities in view of current and future security challenges. As part of this Plan, the Commission has proposed the creation of a European Defence Fund.

The purpose of the Defence Fund is to promote research and innovation and contribute to the strengthening of the European defence technology and industrial base, and to further stimulate the development of key defence capabilities. The Commission has proposed that the fund would have research and capability windows.

In the research window, it is proposed that €90 million in funding will be made available for collaborative defence research projects over the period 2017-20 in what is known as the "preparatory action". The Commission also proposed that, post 2020, a European Defence Research Programme will be established which will require funding of €500 million per annum. It should be noted that this has yet to be negotiated as part of the post 2020 multiannual financial framework, the negotiation of which has not yet commenced.

Under the capability window, the establishment of a fund is proposed. The fund would facilitate Member States in purchasing capability platforms together through the pooling of national contributions, where possible supported by the EU budget. The Commission estimates that this fund would be in the region of €5 billion per year. It is important to highlight that this would depend on individual Member States agreeing to initiate joint projects which they would co-fund from national resources. To date, no such ambition on pooling resources across the union has been realised.

For certain Member States in the EU, defence is a significant contributor to their economies, representing an EU industry of €100 billion with 1.5 million direct and indirect employees. Ireland does not have an issue with funding of defence research. As I have stated previously to the House, for Ireland to have a well-equipped and capability driven Defence Forces we must support the funding of defence research. Ireland may not have a defence industry but this does not stop Ireland tapping into funding through our well established companies in the dual-use product and technology sectors. However we will have to look at how these proposals evolve in the context of the next multi-annual financial framework and where Ireland's best interests lie in that regard, particularly in relation to research funding in general.

I am also satisfied that the proposals in the Action Plan fully acknowledge and reaffirm that Defence remains a Member State prerogative. Decisions about expenditure, military capabilities, Research and Technology are and remain matters for individual Member States in the first instance.

### **Overseas Missions Data**

10. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces who are currently serving overseas; the missions they are on; if he expects that number to rise or fall in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15525/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 01 March 2017, Ireland is contributing 585 Defence Forces personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations.

The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 378 personnel and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 136 personnel.

The 378 personnel in UNIFIL serve alongside Finnish Armed Forces as part of a joint Battalion of which Ireland took over command in November 2016. As a consequence of taking over command we deployed an additional Company of some 150 personnel as part of Ireland's contribution to this mission.

Ireland has a long and continuous record of contributing to peacekeeping missions. Participation in these missions demonstrates Ireland's strong support for the role of the United Nations in international peacekeeping. The current contribution of some 585 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in this area.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The question of a further deployment of Naval vessels to the Mediterranean is currently under consideration.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are listed in the tabular statement.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas As of 1 March 2017

**1. UN MISSIONS**

**(i) UNIFIL** (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQ - 30

UNIFIL 109th Infantry Battalion - 340

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

**(ii) UNTSO** (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel & Syria - 12

**(iii) MINURSO** (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) - 3

**(iv) MONUSCO** (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) - 4

**(v) UNDOF** (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) HQ - 1

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 54th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) - 130

**TOTAL - 533**

**UN MANDATED MISSIONS**

**(vi) EUFOR** (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 6

**(vii) EUTM Mali** (EU-Led Training Mission) - 18

**(viii) KFOR** (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ - 12

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 569**

**2. ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)**

(i) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina - 1

(ii) Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 2**

**3. EU MILITARY STAFF**

Brussels - 4

**4. MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF**

(i) Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York - 1

(ii) Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna - 1

(iii) Military Representative to EU (Brussels) - 4

(iv) Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels) - 2

(v) EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium - 1

(vi) Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Division, Mons, Belgium - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS**

*Questions Nos. 11 and 12 answered orally.*

### **Air Corps Strength**

13. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to bring the Air Corps up to its staffing levels needed to perform all of its existing functions and reach its stabilised strength; and when he expects the Air Corps will be in a position to provide top cover for all future emergencies. [15494/17]

14. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on recent media reports on the crisis in Defence Forces personnel numbers and its impact on the Air Corps; his plans to increase the Air Corps capability and staffing levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15522/17]

30. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to bring the Air Corps up to staffing levels needed to perform all of its existing functions and reach its stabilised strength; and when he expects the Air Corps will be in a position to provide top cover for all future emergencies. [15427/17]

32. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the 28 cadets currently in training will be assigned specialised roles as technicians, fire crews and as air traffic controllers, in tabular form. [15274/17]

42. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of qualified air traffic controllers who have left the service since 2010, in tabular form. [15272/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 13, 14, 30, 32 and 42 together.

As I outlined earlier, the Air Corps is not providing fixed wing aircraft for routine operations, on an ongoing basis, outside normal hours. However, in exceptional circumstances outside of normal hours, the Air Corps can recall personnel, as happened when Rescue 116 went missing.

The reduction in experienced personnel in the Air Corps has not arisen due to cuts in personnel numbers. As with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel in particular areas of expertise. The Air Corps has experience retirements of highly experienced personnel and these retirements are outstripping the recruitment and training of replacement personnel. The loss of experienced personnel is driven by a range of factors, including the availability of attractive job opportunities in the private and commercial semi-state sectors. The loss of experience personnel has, in turn, impacted the availability of aircraft. As can be seen from the following table, 12 Air Traffic Controllers have left the service since 2010.

I want to assure the House that every effort is being made to address the personnel requirements of the Defence Forces. In the case of the Air Corps this includes:

- Cadets in training,
- Cadet Recruitment Campaign underway,
- Four personnel will complete Air Traffic Control training between May and September

this year,

- The Air Corps is currently inducting a further Air Traffic Control Course,
- NCO vacancies in the Air Corps will be filled from the recently launched NCO promotion competition and
- An Air Corps apprentice class was also inducted in March 2017.

While there are a number of initiatives underway, realistically it will take time for a return to previous levels of capability in the Air Corps as pilots within the system progress to become aircraft commanders and newly qualified cadets become co-pilots. The approach will be governed by the overarching requirements of safety.

In the meantime, the Irish Coast Guard search and rescue services can draw on the support of the Air Corps on an ‘as available’ basis under a Service Level Agreement between the Department of Defence and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the most recent of which has been in place since 2013.

If requested, and if available, the Air Corps provide Top Cover for the Coast Guard using a CASA fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft. Coast Guard helicopters also provide their own Top Cover during Search & Rescue missions. This will continue to be the case.

As the Air Corps returns to the previous level of capability, services will continue to be provided on an “as available” basis. Availability is dependent on a number of criteria including the availability of suitable aircraft, the availability of flying crews and the suitability of weather conditions.

With regard to Air Corps cadets in training, 27 cadets will be commissioned and earn their wings between the end of this year and 2020.

On successful completion of the Air Corps Cadet syllabus, Cadets will be assigned as Pilot Officers in Air Corps Units. Pilot Officers do not fulfill the role of technicians, fire crew or Air Traffic Controllers. These roles are performed by other Defence Forces personnel.

Year	Total Retirements	Officer Retirements	NCO Retirements
2010	6	0	6
2011	1	1	0
2012	1	1	0
2013	0	0	0
2014	0	0	0
2015	0	0	0
2016	3	2	1
2017	1	0	1
Total	12	4	8

### Defence Forces Reserve

15. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to enhance the numbers and roles undertaken by the Army Reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15428/17]

36. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to strength-

en the Reserve Defence Forces. [15490/17]

44. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the plans that have been brought forward by the Secretary General of his Department in conjunction with the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces for the operation of a scheme of opportunities for paid service by members of the Reserve Defence Force. [15411/17]

50. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to expedite recruitment to the Reserve Defence Forces. [15431/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 36, 44 and 50 together.

The White Paper on Defence confirms that the primary role of the Reserve is to augment the Permanent Defence Force in times of crisis. In non-crisis situations, the main focus will be on training to prepare for this role. The White Paper on Defence also noted that members of the RDF continue to play an important role in contributing to state ceremonial events and that the Government values this contribution and decided that it should be assigned as a formal role for the Reserve.

My Government colleagues and I recognise the important role that the Reserve Defence Force has played in contributing to Ireland's defence capability, and we recognise the voluntary service which has been the hallmark of the Reserve. The Government appreciates the service of the members of the Reserve and the White Paper on Defence is clear that there is a continued requirement to retain and develop the Reserve.

Under the current phase of implementation of White Paper actions, two relate specifically to the RDF i.e. attracting recruits from all backgrounds and conducting a skills survey with a view to establishing a Specialist Reserve. Over the course of the lifespan of the White Paper, other projects relating to the development of the Reserve will be examined and developed by the Defence Organisation. These include proposals to be brought forward for the operation of a scheme for opportunities for paid service by members of the Reserve. Recruitment to both the PDF and RDF remains a priority in 2017. Membership of the RDF is voluntary and unpaid and the quest for recruits must compete with the other organisations within the voluntary sector. These conditions along with the unique demands of military service make the issue of attracting recruits a challenging one. In the context of both finite resources and personnel, it is necessary to strike an appropriate balance in terms of PDF and RDF recruitment, so as to deliver the desired effects of maintaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to undertake all roles assigned to it by Government and to advance the single force structure.

It is anticipated the next RDF recruitment campaign will commence in the second half of 2017. Until then the RDF will continue to induct from the 2015/2016 panel. The Defence Forces are reviewing the 2015/2016 RDF competition and as part of this process are examining the competition model to be used in 2017. I am anxious to accelerate the rate of recruitment to the Reserve within means and resources.

With regard to funding, a budget of €2.15m from the Defence vote is allocated to the Reserve with €2.068m of that figure to support paid training of RDF members. Financial support to the Reserve Defence Force Representative Association (RDFRA) is also included in the budget provision.

*Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 7.*

## **Air Corps Strength**

17. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to undertake an independent cost-benefit analysis of the cost of contracted air services as against a fully staffed and resourced Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15402/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I should say at the outset that, as Minister with Responsibility for Defence, I remain open at all times to considering more efficient and effective approaches to provision of Defence services and, whilst I would never rule out the possibility of seeking an independent review of particular aspects of how the Defence Forces is managed and operates, I have no plans, for reasons that I will outline, to have the type of cost-benefit analysis suggested in the Deputy's question undertaken.

Furthermore, I also wish to state, in relation to the reference to a fully staffed Air Corps, that it is acknowledged that, as with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel, including pilots and Air Traffic Control staff. I want to assure the House that there is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps. This includes work on a range of actions to improve pilot retention, whilst recruitment of new personnel is also taking place. Actions are also underway to return a full level of Air Traffic Control services to the Air Corps. Air Traffic Control training is taking place and options to ensure the longer-term sustainability of such services in Baldonnel are being identified.

As regards resourcing generally, the White Paper on Defence contains a number of commitments in relation to aircraft replacement, including replacement of the Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft, suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The two CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft will also be replaced, with consideration given to their replacement with larger more capable aircraft.

The White Paper on Defence was approved by Government in 2015 and followed an extensive consultation process and a comprehensive examination of all Defence requirements over a ten year planning horizon. On this basis, the White Paper set out the various roles assigned by Government to the Defence Forces. These roles are varied, but include providing for the military defence of the State from armed aggression, provision of aid to the civil power - meaning in practice to assist, when requested, An Garda Síochána, who have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State, and also to contribute to national resilience through the provision of specified 'aid to the civil authority' supports to lead agencies in response to major emergencies.

The Air Corps contributes to the fulfilment of these, and indeed to all of the other roles assigned to the Defence Forces, and clearly has and will continue to have a significant contribution to make in this regard, which is also reflective of the need for the Defence Forces to operate jointly. The various roles assigned are mutually supporting and the capacity of the Defence Forces to undertake these fully has a multiplier effect. To look at one service in isolation would fail to capture the value that the services provide through joint approaches to the roles assigned.

In contributing to meeting the roles assigned to the Defence Forces, it is currently the case that various aspects of the provision of aviation services are out-sourced by the Air Corps, principally in the areas of aircraft maintenance, pilot training and technician training. The reasons for this are because the cost of in-house provision of such niche expertise and equipment required would be prohibitively expensive in the context of the number of airframes operated by the Air Corps. Indeed, I understand that this is normal practice internationally.

My Department and the Defence Forces continue to keep an open mind in relation to the possibility of out-sourcing generally, but it must be acknowledged that there are clearly limits to how far this can go, given the security sensitive nature of many Air Corps' operations provided to An Garda Síochána and the Revenue Customs Service which means that an in-house capacity is critical.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

18. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the Public Service Pay Commission analysis on the most appropriate pay levels for the public service, including the Defence Forces, will be completed; and if the recommendations will be made public. [15267/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** You will be aware that the Public Service Pay Commission, announced by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has been tasked with providing analysis and advice on remuneration for the public service, including the Defence Forces, in the context of the FEMPI Acts 2009 - 2015.

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.

I understand that the Representative Associations for the Defence Forces, RACO and PD-FORRA, have submitted their observations to the Commission. I can confirm that my Department has also recently submitted initial observations to the Commission, via the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. As these matters are under deliberation, I trust the Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to disclose the content of the Department's submission at this point in time.

I am advised that the initial report of the Commission, including all submission made to the Body, will be published on their website in due course.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

19. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to honour the terms and conditions of service of the representative association professional staff under Defence Forces regulation S6 as it relates to their career progression arrangement. [15410/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe) (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Where full-time officials of representative associations are serving personnel, there are informal arrangements in place for their advancement in rank in the normal course. These arrangements are predicated on the principle that such personnel should not suffer any adverse or beneficial impacts on their promotion prospects relative to their peer group as a result of their representing the interests of their members while they serve as full-time officials.

I have recently received correspondence from one of the Representative Associations relating to their full-time officials and will respond to them shortly in this regard.

Senior officials from my Department met with RACO representatives in February of this year to discuss the matter with a view to having an agreed resolution implemented as soon as possible.



While I understand no immediate agreement was reached, I am advised that the Department will be in further contact with the Association in the coming weeks with a view to finalising this matter.

### **Air Corps Operations**

20. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the measures he will take to enhance the search and rescue capacity of the Air Corps as a back-up to the Coast Guard and RNLI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15487/17]

29. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on reports that due to a shortage of pilots and air traffic controllers the Air Corps lacks the capacity to provide adequate air ambulance services and top cover for search and rescue missions; and the efforts being made to recruit and train specialised personnel to fill these positions. [15265/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 29 together.

The Air Corps continues to provide a broad range of services on a daily basis for a diverse range of tasks such as Army and Naval Service support, the Emergency Aeromedical Service, maritime patrols and fishery protection, the Ministerial Air Transport Service, inter-hospital transfers and Aid to the Civil Power duties including the Garda Air Support Unit and cash escorts.

The Irish Coast Guard, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, has overall responsibility for the provision of Search & Rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region. It is a nationwide maritime emergency organisation that provides a variety of services to shipping and other government agencies. Coast Guard helicopters contribute to the provision of maritime search & rescue within the Irish search and rescue region.

In the past, the Air Corps provided search and rescue services but was withdrawn from this role in 2004 following a handover to CHC Ireland, a private operator. This decision was taken on account of what has always been the overriding concern of the Government: the safety of mariners and indeed anyone who gets into difficulty where Search & Rescue can respond.

The Irish Coast Guard search and rescue services can request the support of the Air Corps on an 'as available' basis under a Service Level Agreement between the Department of Defence and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the most recent of which has been in place since 2013. Availability is dependent upon a number of criteria including the availability of suitable aircraft, the availability of flying crews and the suitability of weather conditions.

If requested, and if available, the Air Corps provide "top-cover" for the Coast Guard using a CASA fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft. Coast Guard helicopters also provide their own "top-cover" during Search & Rescue missions.

Having regard to the co-ordination of transport arrangements for paediatric organ transplant transfers to the UK, the HSE's Aeromedical Desk in its National Emergency Operations Centre is responsible for this coordination. Air transport for these patients is currently provided in three ways: Air Corps fixed-wing and rotor-wing aircraft; Irish Coast Guard rotor-wing aircraft; and private air ambulance providers.

The Department of Defence has a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Health

and the HSE for the Air Corps to use its fleet of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to transport patients and medical teams between hospitals within Ireland and abroad, on an ‘as available’ basis as outlined above.

I can confirm that the level of availability of Air Corps aircraft for such tasks has reduced. This reduction is largely because the Air Corps has experienced retirements of highly experienced personnel which is outstripping the recruitment and training of replacement personnel.

All agencies which the Air Corps provides supports in accordance with their Service Level Agreements were notified of this reduced availability last summer. However, it is normal practice for Agencies to check for Air Corps availability as relevant missions arise.

I want to assure the Deputy that, while there has been this loss of experienced personnel, there is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps.

### **Air Corps Operations**

21. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will conduct a review and report on the resources available to the Air Corps to provide top cover following the recent tragedy in County Mayo. [15493/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of the preparation of the White Paper on Defence, the Department of Defence and Defence Forces carried out an extensive review of defence requirements including capabilities required for the period extending to 2025.

The Air Corps operates two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, which are primarily used for sea fisheries protection and maritime patrolling. They are also on occasion tasked with providing support, including “top-cover” to civil authorities on an “as available” basis. The White Paper on Defence commits to replacing these two CASA 235 aircraft over the lifetime of the White Paper.

The Irish Coast Guard, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, has overall responsibility for the provision of Search & Rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region. It provides a nationwide maritime emergency organisation that provides a variety of services to shipping and other government agencies. Coast Guard helicopters contribute to the provision of maritime search & rescue within the Irish search and rescue region.

In the past, the Air Corps provided search and rescue services but was withdrawn from this role in 2004 following a handover to CHC Ireland, a private operator. This decision was taken on account of what has always been the overriding concern of the Government: the safety of mariners and indeed anyone who gets into difficulty where Search & Rescue can respond.

The Irish Coast Guard search and rescue services can request the support of the Air Corps on an “as available” basis under a Service Level Agreement between the Department of Defence and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The most recent of which has been in place since 2013. Availability is dependent upon a number of factors including the availability of suitable aircraft, the availability of flying crews and the suitability of weather conditions.

If requested, and if available, the Air Corps provide “top-cover” for the Coast Guard using a CASA fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft. Coast Guard helicopters also provide their own

“top-cover” during Search & Rescue missions.

I can confirm to the House, that the level of availability of Air Corps aircraft for such tasks has reduced. This reduction is largely because the Air Corps has experienced retirements of highly experienced personnel. These retirements are outstripping the recruitment and training of replacement personnel.

The loss of experienced personnel is driven by a range of factors, including the availability of attractive job opportunities in the private and commercial semi-state sectors.

I want to assure the Deputy that, while there has been a loss of experienced personnel, there is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps.

The Air Corps continues to provide a broad range of services on a daily basis for a diverse range of tasks such as Army and Naval Service support, the Emergency Aero-medical Service, maritime patrols and fishery protection, the Ministerial Air Transport Service, inter-hospital transfers and Aid to the Civil Power duties including the Garda Air Support Unit and security escorts.

### **Defence Forces Funding**

22. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he plans to meet the 2% of GDP spending target on defence agreed by EU member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15484/17]

28. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Ireland will be exempted from having to increase its spending on weapons and military capabilities from 0.6% to 2% of GDP (details supplied). [15269/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 28 together.

In June 2016 the European Council adopted Conclusions welcoming the presentation by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Frederica Mogherini, of the European Union Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) and invited the High Representative, the Commission and the Council to take the work forward.

In order to build the capabilities and capacity required to enhance the EU’s ability to respond to external crises through the Common Security and Defence Policy, the EU Global Strategy states that member States must channel a sufficient level of expenditure to defence and make the most efficient use of their resources. This is not new and recalls the European Council’s call on member States in June 2015 to allocate a sufficient level of expenditure for defence and the need to make the most effective use of resources.

There is no requirement on Ireland or any other EU member State to achieve any specific target in relation to Defence expenditure, nor is there any agreement at EU level in this regard. As I am sure the Deputies are aware, the Lisbon Treaty explicitly provides that it is entirely a matter for Ireland, or any other Member State, to determine the nature and volume of its own defence and security expenditure, as well as the nature of its defence capabilities.

*Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 12.*

*Questions Nos. 24 and 25 answered with Question No. 8.*

## Defence Forces Training

26. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason adequate warning and notice signage has not been upgraded in the area of the Hollow Road on the Curragh, which is regularly closed to facilitate the firing on the Defence Forces rifle ranges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15421/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Range No. 3 is a rifle range within the Curragh Camp and since March 2016 the Defence Forces have resumed training on this range. This has resulted in the occasional temporary closure by the Defence Forces of the Hollow Road. The temporary road closures are required as part of strict control and safety measures put in place by the Defence Forces to ensure public safety during the firing of live ammunition on Range No. 3.

These occasional temporary road closures by the Defence Forces are in accordance with the provisions of Section 274 of the Defence Act, 1954, as amended. This provides the Defence Forces with the powers to temporarily stop all traffic in the vicinity of any place used for rifle practices. It is acknowledged that the occasional temporary closure of the Hollow Road may be an inconvenience for some local residents.

I have been advised by the military authorities that signage is temporarily erected at either end of the Hollow Road and Brownstown on the day prior to the required closures. This gives advance notice of the date and duration of the proposed road closure. This alerts local residents and road users of the need to take alternative detour routes. Military Sentries are on duty at either end of the Hollow Road during the road closures to control the traffic and to advise users of the alternative routes.

The military authorities have also advised that red warning flags are flown while firing is being conducted, and warning lights are activated in the centre of the Curragh Camp outside of the water tower, in full view of the public as further safety and information notification measures. The Defence Forces website, <http://www.military.ie/info-centre/dftc-road-closures/>, provides members of the public with details of planned road closures.

There are no plans in place to upgrade the signage at this time.

## Air Corps

27. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will establish a review to determine if the chronic illnesses suffered by former Air Corps staff were as a result of exposure to chemicals while working at Casement Aerodrome. [15412/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As I indicated in my responses to other recent Parliamentary Questions on this issue, a number of former and serving Air Corps personnel are suing the Minister for Defence alleging personal injuries arising from exposure to workplace chemicals. It is not appropriate for me to comment on this matter at this time as these cases are the subject of ongoing civil litigation before the High Court.

The Deputy will be aware that there are a number of processes already in train in relation to reviewing health and safety procedures in the Air Corps. Following a number of inspections at the Air Corps premises at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, in 2016, the Health and Safety Authority issued a report of inspection with a number of general improvements and recommendations for follow up. The Air Corps committed to addressing these recommendations as

part of an eight phase implementation plan. I am advised that seven out of the eight phases are planned to be completed by May 2017.

In September 2016 I appointed an independent third party to review allegations made in a number of protected disclosures relating to health and safety issues in the Air Corps which were received in late 2015 and early 2016. Once a final review is to hand, I will determine any further steps required and ensure that all recommendations, whether arising from the work of the Health and Safety Authority or the ongoing protected disclosure review, will be acted upon to ensure the safety of the men and women of the Air Corps. In the circumstances and pending the completion of the ongoing processes, I have no plans at this time to commission another review on this matter.

*Question No. 28 answered with Question No. 22.*

*Question No. 29 answered with Question No. 20.*

*Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 13.*

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

31. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel currently in receipt of family income supplement and housing assistance payments; his views on pay levels in the Defence Forces in view of the fact that in 2013 over 20% of Defence Forces personnel were in receipt of FIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15260/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in each part of the Irish public sector have traditionally been set by reference to levels of pay available in related public sector employments.

I fully appreciate that many of our citizens continue to face some difficulties in the current economic and fiscal environment, including members of the Defence Forces. The Government is making every effort, within available resources, to support all those who face hardship. In addition, there are various schemes in place through the Department of Social Protection, including Family Income Supplement, housing Assistance to support those on low incomes.

The circumstances surrounding an application for Family Income Supplement, or indeed any other scheme operated by the Department of Social Protection, is a private matter between the applicant and the Department of Social Protection. I am, therefore, not aware of the eligibility of individual members of the Permanent Defence Force to receive such allowances, or the total numbers of Defence Force members that may be in receipt of this financial support. Various factors can give rise to such claims. However, the important thing is that, despite the difficult economic environment we have witnessed over the last few years, the Government has maintained this important safety net for families who by virtue of their particular circumstances require financial support.

In terms of remuneration going forward, the new 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 to the Government on public service remuneration, including the Defence Forces, in the context of the FEMPI Acts 2009 - 2015 and is due 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.

### **Defence Forces Strength**

33. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Air Corps has sufficient personnel, equipment and training to meet all emergencies as required on land or sea, including coastal patrols and air and sea rescue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15491/17]

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps continue to have available to them the equipment, training and personnel to meet all eventualities in which they might be called upon in emergency or other situations; if adequate updating, upgrading and upskilling takes place with regularity in all cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15492/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 33 and 41 together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to carry out all roles assigned by Government. In this context, the full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any emergencies that may arise. In relation to the Air Corps, it can provide airborne and other supports to the Principal Response Agencies and my Department has put in place Memoranda of Understandings and Service Level Agreements with other government departments and agencies to both ensure the maintenance of essential services and also to capture the wide ranging supports that the Defence Forces can provide in emergency situations.

While there has been a loss of experienced personnel in the Air Corps, there is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps and it is important to note that in exceptional circumstances, including outside of normal hours, the Air Corps can recall personnel, and deploy.

The acquisition of new equipment and equipment upgrades for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me, and the White Paper on Defence published in 2015 recognises that there are several new and enhanced platforms to be procured. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper as part of the capability development and equipment planning processes.

In the case of the Air Corps, equipment priorities set out in the White Paper recognise that there are a number of new and enhanced platforms to be procured, including the replacement of the Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks, and replacement of the two Casa maritime patrol aircraft.

The Defence Forces keep their operational plans and response capabilities for dealing with a wide range of emergencies under constant review and significant and continuous effort is put into ensuring that they remain up-to-date with regard to best practice.

On the issue of training, considerable training expertise exists within the Defence Forces and this expertise is continually benchmarked against best international practice. Where the capability exists, relevant training is delivered in-house by highly trained and knowledgeable training instructors. Where appropriate, Defence Forces personnel are also sent on relevant

external courses, both within Ireland and overseas.

I am satisfied that the resources are available to the Defence Forces, to enable the fulfilment of all roles assigned by Government, including in emergency situations.

### **Defence Forces Reorganisation**

34. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if consideration is being given to a reorganisation of the Permanent Defence Forces with particular reference to the security needs of the Border region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15432/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In 2012, a major re-organisation of the Defence Forces took place which resulted in the consolidation of under-strength units into a smaller number of full strength units, a reduction in the number of headquarters and the associated re-deployment of personnel from administrative and support functions to operational units.

As a result of the re-organisation, the operational capacity of the Defence Forces has been maintained to the greatest extent possible, within the available resource envelope. Also of significance however, is the fact that the re-organisation has led to an improvement in the deployability and sustainability of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas. There are no plans at present for any further re-organisation but future operational requirements are kept under review.

As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department is engaged in forward planning for the UK exit from the EU. While the nature of the border will be decided during the course of the negotiations, it is this Government's stated goal to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána, while the Revenue Commissioners have responsibilities relating to Customs matters. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners. The fact of a UK exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements at this time.

The Defence Forces keep their operational plans under constant review and there is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place.

### **Air Corps Operations**

35. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the Air Corps could not provide top cover for the Coast Guard in north County Mayo on 15 March 2017 but was able to provide two helicopters covering a large cash in transit on the M50 towards the mint in Sandyford two days later. [15259/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Deputy will appreciate that the operational details in relation to any aspect of cash movement missions cannot be disclosed for security reasons. However, in general terms, specific requests for Air Corps

involvement in operations results in differing responses depending on the type of operation, the availability of aircraft, the availability of aircrew, weather conditions etc.

On the night of the tragic incident, it was not possible to undertake the Coast Guard request for the Air Corps to provide 'Top Cover' because the Air Corps is not providing fixed wing aircraft for routine operations outside normal hours, on an ongoing basis, due to the loss of experienced personnel. There is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps.

The Air Corps continues to provide a broad range of services on a daily basis for a diverse range of tasks such as Army and Naval Service support, the Emergency Aeromedical Service, maritime patrols and fishery protection, the Ministerial Air Transport Service, inter-hospital transfers and Aid to the Civil Power duties including the Garda Air Support Unit and security escorts.

*Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 15.*

### **Brexit Issues**

37. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of persons in Northern Ireland with Irish passports who wish to join the Defence Forces not just here but in the UN on missions abroad in the event of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15429/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The status of persons in Northern Ireland with Irish passports who wish to join the Defence Forces remains unchanged. It is not envisaged that the United Kingdom's exit from the EU will have a bearing on their status.

### **Defence Forces Deployment**

38. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the reinstatement of troops in the Border counties following the triggering of Article 50 and in view of a hard border being reintroduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15430/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The UK is expected to trigger Article 50 today. A meeting of the EU 27 Heads of State and Government is scheduled to take place on 29 April to discuss the UK withdrawal. It is expected that formal negotiations will commence in May or June, once the remaining 27 member States reach consensus on the EU's negotiating position. The negotiations themselves can then be expected to take at least two years to complete and all potential consequences in the defence sphere, arising during the negotiations, will remain the subject of ongoing consideration by my Department throughout this process.

As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department is engaged in forward planning for the UK exit from the EU. While the nature of the border will be decided during the course of the negotiations, it is this Government's stated goal to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibili-



ties relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners. The fact of a UK exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements at this time.

The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review. My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Army, Air corps and Naval Service to carry out their roles as assigned by Government. There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place.

### **Military Medals**

39. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the establishment under Defence Forces regulations of a board of military officers to re-examine and review the recommendations made in the original 2004 review of the events at Jadotville. [15409/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In accordance with Defence Forces regulations the award of medals for bravery is time bound. These may not be awarded in any case unless a recommendation is made through the usual channels to the Chief of Staff, not later than two years in the case of the Military Medal for Gallantry, and not later than four years in the case of the Distinguished Service Medal, after the performance of the act in respect of which the recommendation is made. Such awards are made on the recommendation of a Military Board appointed by the Chief of Staff for the purpose of examining and reporting on every recommendation for an award.

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.

The review conducted in 2004 was not conducted by a Board established to consider the award of medals, but for the purpose of a broader examination of the Jadotville case. This Board of Military Officers recommended that the events of Jadotville and the contribution of the 35th Battalion be given recognition. In this context, in November 2005, a plaque was unveiled in Custume Barracks Athlone to commemorate the events at Jadotville and the very significant contribution of “A” Company and of the 35th Battalion, as a whole, to the UN Peace Support Mission in the Congo.

Further recognition of their contribution over subsequent years was as follows:

A. There was a presentation of scrolls in 2006.

B. Portraits of Lt Col McNamee (35th Battalion Commander) and Comdt Quinlan (Company Commander “A” Company) were commissioned. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007 these portraits were unveiled at the Military College and now hang in the Congo Room in the United Nations Training School in the Curragh.

C. In July of 2010 the 50th anniversary of the first deployment to the Congo was commemorated in a highly publicised and well attended event in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell. A Congo photographic book was also produced for the occasion; a section of which was dedicated to the events at Jadotville in 1961.

D. A nominal roll of “A” Company, printed in copper, has been affixed to the monument in Costume Barracks and was unveiled as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Jadotville affair in September 2011.

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 17 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 recognize 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.

I am satisfied that the events and happenings to date, in particular the award of a unit citation and specially commissioned Insignia, properly honour the collective bravery of the men of “A” Company.

### **European Defence Action Plan**

40. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will block progress towards the establishment of a common European military headquarters in order to prevent the further militarisation of the EU. [15485/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are no plans at EU level to establish a common EU military operational headquarters. As I previously advised the House, there have been proposals around for some time, that the EU should establish a joint operational headquarter capacity to support the planning and conduct of its civil and military operations. A permanent joint civil-military operational headquarters, appropriately configured, could potentially deliver more effective and responsive CSDP operations in support of the UN and international peace and security, a position which Ireland supports drawing together the civil and military aspect of crisis management operations in the comprehensive approach.

The proposal currently being advanced is the development of civil/military planning and conduct capabilities, coordinated through a joint coordination cell, to improve the EU’s capacity to react in a faster, more effective and more seamless manner. The proposal is to build on existing structures with a view to enhancing civilian-military synergies to support the effective planning and operation of civilian and non-executive military CSDP missions, as part of the

EU's Comprehensive Approach.

In effect this means the creation of a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), within the existing EU Military Staff structures in Brussels, which will be responsible at the strategic level for the operational planning and conduct of non-executive military missions working under the political control and strategic guidance direction of the Political and Security Committee. Non-executive military missions are capacity building, training and advisory missions.

This newly created MPCC will work in parallel and in a coordinated way with the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) supported by a Joint Support Coordination Cell which brings together the civilian and military expertise in key mission support areas. This will further strengthen and enable effective civilian/military coordination and cooperation in the operational planning and conduct of CSDP civilian and non-executive military missions.

I do not believe that it represents an increase in or a move towards militarisation of the EU. The Lisbon Treaty provides that the Common Security and Defence Policy "shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on assets, civil and military. The Union may use them on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The performance of these tasks shall be undertaken using the capabilities provided by the Member States".

I am satisfied that the issue of having an effective joint planning and operational capacity to support civilian and non-executive military CSDP missions is one which is reasonable, particularly having regard to the EU's comprehensive approach to international crises.

*Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 33.*

*Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 13.*

### **Defence Forces Deployment**

43. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the current strength of the Defence Forces at Custume Barracks, Athlone; and his plans for same. [15489/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The current strength of Defence Force personnel at Custume barracks, Athlone on 28 Feb 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, was 833 across all ranks.

The re-organisation in 2013 did not significantly alter the actual number of PDF personnel serving in Custume Barracks, Athlone. In accordance with the revised organisational structures, as of 30 November 2012 the establishment for Units based in Custume Barracks is 995 personnel. The effect of the re-organisation on Custume Barracks is that the actual number of PDF personnel based in Custume Barracks has been stabilised within an overall strength ceiling of 9,500 PDF personnel.

No member of the Defence Forces is exclusively or permanently based in any one location, including Custume Barracks. There is a constant through flow of personnel into and out of Custume Barracks and indeed other Barracks. This is because military service involves personnel moving into and out of particular postings as they serve at home and overseas, receive training and undergo educational and career development courses.

As has been previously stated at meetings between my officials and local representatives regarding the matter of Custume Barracks, I am committed to the future of the facility as an important, operational military Barracks. There are no plans to change this.

*Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 15.*

### **Defence Forces Reorganisation**

45. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on criticism of the efforts to reorganise the Army, which in view of unprecedented retirements and resignations have left a significant skills deficit; and his further views on whether low pay, poor morale and isolation from family and home are primary drivers that have resulted in an exodus of personnel. [15275/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of a major re-organisation of the Defence Forces in 2012, a decision was taken to consolidate what were then three under-strength Army brigades into two full strength brigades. The decision was taken because it was clear that the three brigade structure was no longer viable, particularly when compared to international norms.

Key aspects of the re-organisation included the consolidation of under-strength units into a smaller number of full strength units, a reduction in the number of headquarters and the associated re-deployment of personnel from administrative and support functions to operational units.

The White Paper on Defence, which was published in 2015, resulted from a comprehensive examination of Defence requirements over a ten year planning horizon and it specifically provides for the retention of the Army's two Brigade structure.

The re-organisation has maintained the operational capacity of the Defence Forces to the greatest extent possible within the available resource envelope and has improved the deployability and sustainability of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas. There are no plans to return to a three brigade structure which would cause a range of unnecessary inefficiencies, such as an increased administrative burden arising from the need to re-introduce a layer of non-operational middle management, and a return to under-strength units.

Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a very high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. However, this is not new and pre-dates the 2012 re-organisation. The Defence Forces have always had a large turnover of approximately 500 personnel on an annual basis. Moreover, a certain level of turnover is of course desirable as a human resources and organisational objective in order to maintain an appropriate age profile across the Defence Forces and to retain an approach to regular revitalisation.

In order to ameliorate the challenges associated with the turnover of personnel, a continuous yearly recruitment drive is operated by the Defence Forces and in 2017 it is planned to recruit 860 personnel across all services.

Additionally, the Defence Forces operates a scheme of voluntary exit interviewing of personnel of all ranks and from all services to ascertain any potential trends or future challenges. The reasons provided are many fold and can range from economic factors, to family circumstances, lifestyle, and a desire for a change in career.

One of the key policies supporting personnel retention is the opportunity for extensive personal and professional development offered by the Defence Forces through accredited courses,

and a unique range of careers. But it is also the case that the extensive professional training they receive makes them very attractive to the private sector. It is acknowledged that the resurgence in the private sector jobs market is impacting on the Defence Forces at this time.

In terms of pay, the position is that the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2015 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement) define current pay policy across the public service.

The Defence Forces Climate Survey published in 2016 was conducted in order to inform consideration of the ongoing human resource and strategic needs of the Defence Forces. The Survey findings clearly point to challenges for the Defence Forces, particularly in the areas of leadership, communication, organisational culture, the working environment and active management of personal expectations. However, many positives also emanated from the Survey, especially in relation to the commitment of personnel to the values and mission of the Organisation, high levels of work satisfaction, pride in the Organisation and positive views on culture and work support.

### **Defence Forces Operations**

46. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Army was called on to perform aid to the civil power duties at Shannon Airport on 23 and 24 January 2017; and if aid to the civil power duties were requested for a plane (details supplied). [15263/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

Since 5 February 2003, the Gardaí have requested support from the Defence Forces at Shannon Airport on occasion. The decision to seek support from the Defence Forces is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

I can confirm that An Garda Síochána did not request assistance from the Defence Forces at Shannon Airport on 23 January 2017. I can also confirm that An Garda Síochána did request the support of the Defence Forces on 24 January 2017, and personnel were deployed to Shannon Airport on that date.

The issue of overflights by foreign military aircraft and the use of Shannon Airport by foreign military aircraft is the responsibility of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Successive Governments have made overflight and landing facilities available at Shannon Airport to the United States for well over 50 years.

### **Defence Forces Personnel Data**

47. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel who have left the three branches since 2013, in tabular form. [15273/17]

**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 personnel as

stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. The manpower requirement is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with 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.

More immediately, in terms of recruitment, the Defence Forces continue to recruit at cadet, specialist and general service for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. Both the General Service and Cadet competitions are currently open and competitions for direct entry watch keepers in the Naval Service will result in inductions shortly. An Air Corps Apprentice Class has also been inducted in March 2017.

Many individuals who exit the Defence Forces do so voluntarily to take up employment opportunities that are becoming increasingly available in the private and public sectors. The extensive training that Defence Forces personnel receive makes them very attractive within the private sector. Applications for voluntary discharge can be made for a variety of reasons such as ‘on pension after 21 years’, ‘at own request’, ‘on termination of engagement’, and ‘discharge by purchase of a recruit’.

The following table shows the number of personnel (Officers and ‘other ranks’) that have left the Defence Forces since January 2013 across all three services.

-	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*	TOTAL
ARMY						
Officers	41	55	57	62	8	223
Other Ranks	308	316	375	451	69	1519
						1742
AIR CORPS						
Officers	10	13	9	13	0	45
Other Ranks	21	30	48	36	8	143
						188
NAVAL SERVICE						
Officers	8	14	9	5	0	36
Other Ranks	57	41	58	88	15	259
						295
	445	469	556	655	100	2225

Note : 2017 refers up to 28 February 2017, the latest date for which figures are available.

### Foreign Naval Vessels

48. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the basis on which permission was granted to a US warship (details supplied) to dock in Cobh in March 2017; and if Defence Forces personnel were involved in supplying security to the warship. [15483/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Visits from foreign naval vessels are a long-standing and common practice in Ireland and worldwide. Foreign naval vessels are granted permission by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to visit Irish

ports on condition that they meet the necessary policy stipulations. This requires that visiting naval vessels do not carry nuclear weapons and do not engage in military exercises. The vessel in question was in Ireland as part of a routine visit and was granted permission by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to dock on the basis that it met these criteria.

Security arrangements for such visits are a matter for An Garda Síochána. The roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which in practice means to assist, on request, An Garda Síochána. On this occasion, the Naval Service was not requested by An Garda Síochána to provide support with security arrangements.

The Naval Service provided a liaison officer facility for the USS Donald Cook, which is a standard courtesy afforded to all visiting naval vessels. In addition, the Naval Service hosted representatives of the crew of the vessel for a short courtesy visit to the Naval Base, again in accordance with standard protocols.

### **Air Corps Operations**

49. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of requests for assistance made to the Air Corps in 2016; the number of requests that were and were not fulfilled; the reasons the Air Corps was unable to facilitate any such requests; the required complement of staff necessary to enable the Air Corps to respond appropriately to requests for assistance; the number of vacancies in the Air Corps; the steps being taken to fill such vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15401/17]

51. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of requests the Air Corps could not fulfil from 2015 to date in 2017 as a consequence of inadequate aircraft, pilot or air traffic controller availability, in tabular form. [15271/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 51 together.

The Air Corps continues to provide a broad range of services on a daily basis for a diverse range of tasks such as Army and Naval Service support, the Emergency Aero-medical Service, maritime patrols and fishery protection, the Ministerial Air Transport Service, inter-hospital transfers and Aid to the Civil Power duties including the Garda Air Support Unit and security escorts.

The Air Corps is currently experiencing shortages of trained personnel and this has led to reduced availability of certain aircraft.

I want to assure the Deputies that there is significant work underway in the Defence Organisation, both civil and military, aimed at improving the capacity of the Air Corps. 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. The strength of the Air Corps on 28 February 2017 stands at 701.

Recruitment of new personnel is taking place and pilot cadets are in training. However, it will take time for these cadets, when qualified, to develop their skills and expertise. As such, a return to previous levels of capability in the Air Corps will be a gradual process as pilots within the system progress to become aircraft commanders and newly qualified cadets become pilots.

29 March 2017

Actions are also underway to return a full level of air traffic control services to the Air Corps. Air Traffic Control (ATC) training is taking place and options to ensure the longer-term sustainability of ATC services in Baldonnell are being identified. These measures will facilitate a gradual extension of operational hours for air traffic control services in Baldonnell over the year, beginning this May, as newly qualified personnel develop their experience and with an anticipated return to full 24/7 service in early 2018.

In addition, the Air Corps is currently inducting a further Air Traffic Control Course, eight students commenced training on Monday, 27th March 2017, this is in addition to six (6) Air Traffic Services personnel who are part-way through their training.

A new NCO promotion competition, to fill the ranks of Sergeants and above, including those in the Air Corps, has been launched. It is anticipated that promotions from this competition will commence in Quarter 3 2017.

The 2017 Air Corps Apprenticeship competition is due to commence shortly and it is planned that following this process 25 new Air Corps apprentices will be inducted in late September 2017 to commence their training. This is in addition to 11 Air Corps Apprentices who are due to commence their training shortly.

I have requested the detailed information sought by the Deputy from the Military Authorities and I will revert to the Deputy in due course when this information is available.

*Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 15.*

*Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

52. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of discussions between the Workplace Relations Commission and PDFORRA on the Public Service Pay Commission. [15268/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Public Service Pay Commission, announced by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has been tasked with providing analysis and advice on public sector remuneration, including the Defence Forces, in the context of the FEMPI Acts 2009 – 2015. 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.

While I understand that PDFORRA has made a submission to the Commission, as the Deputy will appreciate, the Commission does not operate under the aegis of my Department and I am not aware of any further discussion between the Commission and PDFORRA in this regard.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

53. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if associations such as RACO and PDFORRA have been engaged in terms of pay and conditions in a similar way to the GRA and the AGSI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10590/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As the Deputy is



aware the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF Representative Associations, RACO and PD-FORRA, to engage with the Official side. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a means for the determination of claims and proposals from the Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service. Since 1993, there have been significant developments and improvements in the pay and conditions of military personnel. The Representative Associations have been to the fore in advancing the interests of their members in this regard, bringing them in line generally with the pay and conditions available in other public service employments. The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme includes access to an independent adjudication.

In addition, a framework exists which facilitates the Associations engaging with the official side in talks parallel to those taking place between ICTU and the official side at National level. This parallel process operated in respect of the 2015 rounds of discussions, facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission, on an extension to the 'Public Service Agreement 2013 – 2016' leading to the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

I have received representations from PDFORRA seeking to have access to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court made available to them in the event of any future legislative changes being made to provide An Garda Síochána with access to same. I remain satisfied with the present arrangements in place for the Defence Forces and have no immediate plans to make any changes. However, in the light of PDFORRA's representations the matter is being kept under review, including in the context of any future arrangements to be made for An Garda Síochána.

### **Health and Safety**

54. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the health and safety assessments that have been carried out into procedures and protocols at Case-ment Aerodrome prior to the 2016 HSA health and safety report. [15266/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a high priority for me and for the Military Authorities. I am advised that it is the policy of the Defence Forces to manage Health and Safety risks to all of its members. This is achieved in line with national Health and Safety regulations. The Defence Forces are committed to continuous risk mitigation and encourage inputs from their stakeholders to ensure that the work environment is as safe as possible.

I have made inquiries with the military authorities as to the latest status of the Health and Safety assessments and am awaiting a response, which I will communicate to the Deputy in due course.

### **Garda Deployment**

55. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí currently serving in the drugs squad located in the Kerry Garda division; the number serving in each of the years 2012 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15540/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resour-

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

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

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and 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 informed by the Commissioner that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, some 839 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 Gardaí across the organisation including the Divisional Drugs Units.

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

The following table gives a breakdown of the number of Garda members assigned to the Kerry Division Drugs Unit in each of the years 2012 to 28 February 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

Kerry Division Drugs Unit

Year	Strength
2012	6
2013	8

Year	Strength
2014	10
2015	9
2016	7
2017	7

### Naturalisation Applications

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application is likely to be granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15558/17]

**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.

### Immigration Policy

57. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to introducing a humanitarian admission programme that would enable refugees, migrants and naturalised citizens apply for their extended family members who are currently displaced to join them here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15564/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Before the migrant crisis escalated, my predecessor introduced a Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP) subject to certain conditions, including economic dependency on the sponsor, being met. This was superseded by the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) which allows for Syrians and other nationalities to benefit from resettlement and relocation schemes, and offers them protection in Ireland in their own right. This is a much improved programme allowing thousands to benefit from international protection here. There has been a significant challenge at EU level to maximise the functioning of the resettlement and relocation programmes.

We will be 100% ahead of target on resettlement when the programme ends in September and following my recent visit to Greece, I am satisfied that the number coming in under relocation will scale up to the agreed levels this year.

I am not of the view that the best solution to this crisis is to increase the number of programmes and all the administrative and legal complexities that go with them. My emphasis is to increase the number of people arriving in Ireland under the programmes currently in place. I am satisfied that we are making progress now and that there is still capacity to ensure more Syrians and other vulnerable nationalities who require protection can come to Ireland under our resettlement and relocation programmes and all our focus needs to be on meeting these targets. In addition, existing avenues remain open as pathways for family reunification.

Significant resources are currently being invested in these humanitarian efforts through the Offices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration and the International Protection Office. As a result, we have established functioning mechanisms and associated expertise to deal with resettlement and relocation. Our response to the migrant crisis in terms of accepting refugees is through the IRPP and all available resources are being directed to that Programme in order to meet the commitment entered into and I have no plans, at this point, to introduce any additional admission programmes. It is essential that we continue all our efforts to completing the IRPP successfully before we can look to apply that learning and resources to any new programme.

### **Family Reunification Policy**

58. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to enabling Irish citizens and organisations to co-sponsor a family reunification application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15565/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** One of the principles underpinning family reunification decisions is that there must be a clear connection between the person seeking residence in Ireland and some other person living in the State permanently. In such circumstances it is only open to natural persons to act as a sponsor. All of the circumstances in which such a person can seek to sponsor a family member to join them in the State are set out in the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification published on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Family%20Reunification%20Policy%20Document.pdf/Files/Family%20Reunification%20Policy%20Document.pdf>). This policy was recently updated and republished, in December 2016, and I have no further plans to update the policy at this time.

### **Legislative Programme**

59. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will support legislation which would establish hate crime as a specific and punishable crime (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15606/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Any level of hate crime is a matter of concern. The CSO publishes figures for recorded incidents involving discrimination. I expect to receive the final figures for 2016 today, which I will make available to the Deputy, but, in the meantime, I can inform the Deputy that up to the end of quarter 3 of 2016, there were 153 recorded incidents with a discrimination motive.

I would like to assure the Deputy that there are mechanisms in place to deal with hate motivated crime. Where a criminal offence such as assault, criminal damage or a public order offence is committed against a person based on their race, religion, colour, ethnicity or some other ground, the offence is prosecuted through the wider criminal law. It is also accepted that such an offence is more serious on account of the hate or prejudice motivating the crime and Irish courts do consider evidence of a crime being motivated by hate or prejudice as an aggravating factor at sentencing.

With respect to legislation establishing hate crime as a specific and punishable crime, it is important that any legislation which is introduced will allow for effective prosecution of these type of offences. I would also remind the Deputy of the second stage debate in this House in October last year with respect to a Criminal Justice (Aggravation by Prejudice) Bill which is a Private Member's Bill introduced by Deputy O'Loughlin and Deputy Murphy O'Connor. While there was support for the principle of the Bill, there were a number of concerns raised in respect of the approach proposed and the Deputies sponsoring the Bill undertook to further engage in respect of the proposals therein. I recently received further correspondence from Deputy O'Loughlin in respect of that Bill and I intend to further engage with the Deputies in relation to their proposals.

I would also like to draw the attention of the Deputy to the 2016 Annual Report of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency which found that to address racism and xenophobia, EU Member States should ensure that any case of alleged hate crime or hate speech is effectively investigated, prosecuted and tried. The Garda Racial Intercultural and Diversity Office (GRIDO) has responsibility for co-ordinating, monitoring and advising on all aspects of policing Ireland's diverse communities. GRIDO monitors the reporting and recording of hate and racist crime on a continual basis. Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers (ELOs) are appointed to work with minority communities at local level throughout the country. These officers combined with GRIDO play a fundamental role in liaising with minority groups and work in partnership to encourage tolerance, respect and understanding within communities in the pursuit of preventing the commission of hate and racist crime. GRIDO and ELOs provide advice and assistance to victims of hate or racist crime where required or deemed necessary.

In addition, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, an Office of my Department, is the focal point for the Government's commitment on anti-racism as a key aspect of integration, diversity management and broader national social policy. The Office continues to work with all the relevant sectors to further progress the integration and diversity management agenda.

Following the completion of a review of our approach to the integration of migrants the Migrant Integration Strategy was published on the 7th of February, 2017. The Integration Strategy includes an anti-racism component and is available at [www.integration.ie](http://www.integration.ie).

### **Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration**

60. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total spend on translation services used to translate the new application form for international protection, IPO2. [15610/17]

61. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if free online translation services were used to translate the new application form for international protection, IPO2, into any language; and if so, the languages for which a programme (details supplied) was used. [15611/17]

62. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if persons who submitted completed application forms for international protection in the midst of confusion in February 2017 over the deadline for submission of the form, and did not, consequently, receive legal advice before submission, will be permitted to resubmit those application forms, not just submit supplementary information following receipt of legal advice. [15612/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 to 62, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) who, under the International Protection Act 2015, is independent in the performance of his functions, that translation services for the International Protection Office (IPO) of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) are provided on the basis of a public procurement process and subsequent contractual arrangements entered into between a service provider and INIS.

The current service provider, Word Perfect Translation Services Ltd, is contractually obliged to provide such services in a professional manner and in accordance with industry standards. Free online translation services are not used by the International Protection Office.

I am also advised by the CIPO that there is no strict deadline for the return of the Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2) with the timeframe mentioned being purely administrative in nature. Flexibility has been provided by the IPO to applicants in relation to the filling out of the form and its return. Clarification in this regard has been included on the IPO website and in communications between that Office and non-governmental organisations.

As has been pointed out in information issued to applicants by the IPO, supplementary information of any type relevant to a person's application can be provided to that Office up to two weeks prior to the date of an applicant's scheduled interview. This timescale will facilitate the translation of documents if required and ensure that the IPO interviewer has all of their papers available and considered in advance of the interview date. A Customer Service Centre established by the International Protection Office may be contacted by individuals with any queries.

The cost structure in the contract is based on per word charges but the final cost for the services has not yet been furnished by the supplier and accordingly no expenditure has been incurred on the translation of the Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2).

### **Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision**

63. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to provide funding to community CCTV schemes around the country, in particular the Killorglin community CCTV committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15621/17]

**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. I expect to make an announcement in this context shortly.

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide a total breakdown by Garda division and District Court area regarding the discrepancies disclosed on 23 March 2017 between actual alcohol tests administered and the numbers recorded by gardaí for each of the years in question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15640/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will be aware that I have discussed the issue of breath test discrepancies in detail with the Garda Commissioner and the Chairperson of the Policing Authority and have outlined my very serious concerns in relation to the matter. In particular, my concerns stem from the fact that sizeable numbers of the general public have interacted and will interact with An Garda Síochána in the context of road traffic enforcement, including at a Mandatory Alcohol Testing checkpoint. As such, it is critical that there is public confidence in the operation and oversight of these vital enforcement systems.

The Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána has confirmed that it has put solutions in place to deal with the procedural and practice issues that have been detected to ensure that such errors do not recur. Specifically, in the case of breath tests/Mandatory Alcohol Testing, I am informed that An Garda Síochána initially put in place new paper based recording and verification processes, and, in November 2016, a new specific data recording IT upgrade was installed on the Garda PULSE system. The net effect of the new IT upgrade was that personnel now have to record the serial number of the device used for each breath test plus the meter reading before and after the checkpoint was concluded. Data from the device is now used to verify the total number of breath tests conducted at each checkpoint.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner has announced the creation of a dedicated team under newly-appointed Assistant Commissioner Michael O'Sullivan to investigate in detail the MATs issue, including with a view to identifying and holding responsible for their actions any Garda members, whether at junior, supervisory or management level, who acted improperly; and committed to forwarding the report of this investigation to the Policing Authority and Department of Justice and Equality when completed.

Notwithstanding any internal review, the Government believes that an external investigation into these two specific matters needs be carried out. The Government believes the level of public concern is now so profound that it may now be time to conduct a thorough, comprehensive and independent root-and-branch review of An Garda Síochána. That is clearly a proposal that will require further detailed consideration by the Government. The Government also believes that any such proposal should command widespread support in the Oireachtas and accordingly be the subject of consultation with the Opposition, and ultimately approval by the Oireachtas.

Assistant Commissioner Finn outlined new arrangements agreed this week with the Medical Bureau on Roads Safety to the effect that that body would supply An Garda Síochána with its data on breath-testing devices on a quarterly basis, in order to ensure an independent benchmark against which Garda data can be measured. The MBRS will shortly be tendering for new breath testing equipment. New equipment which is available in the market place has the capacity to record the time, GPS location and number of persons breath-tested, and has the capacity to download the information automatically reducing the chances of errors occurring in the data.

The Garda Commissioner has been in direct contact with the Policing Authority in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's question and the Chairperson of the Policing Authority, Josephine Feehily, has confirmed that the Authority will have an independent professional audit undertaken of the steps taken to resolve the issues and oversee the investigation being undertaken by Assistant Commissioner O'Sullivan.

I welcome the fact that the focus of the Authority's next public meeting with the Garda Commissioner will be on road traffic enforcement. This public meeting will be held on 27 April 2017 and will provide a most timely opportunity for An Garda Síochána to engage with the Authority and the general public on these key procedural and practice issues that are now before us. The reason that I prioritised and set up the Authority was to shine a light on and examine issues such as these.

I will continue to maintain close contact with the Garda Commissioner and the Chairperson of the Policing Authority in relation to these matters.

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

### **Immigration Status**

65. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of young foreign national persons who have been in full-time education for at least three years. [15644/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** There are several circumstances in which young foreign national persons may be in the State in full time education. The most obvious would be as an international student. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service has comprehensive guidelines on student migration (<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Students>) which clearly set out the circumstances in which a person may take up residence in the State as a student.

Young persons might also be in full time primary or secondary education in the State as the family member of certain classes of persons who have permission to reside in the State. It does not follow, however, that such non-nationals residing in the State have an automatic right to access State-supported education, particularly at tertiary level. For example, the children of a person working in the State on an employment permit may not be able to avail of State-supported university education for his or her children, and will be required to pay international fees. This is the policy position relating to access to state-supported education by non-EEA nationals generally (young persons recognised as refugees excepted).

I should add, of course, that policy generally in relation to access to full time education in the State is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

### **Direct Provision System**

66. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the establishment of an independent complaints mechanism for those living in direct provision. [15645/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have agreed that the remit of the Offices of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children should be extended to allow them to receive complaints from persons residing in State provided accommodation. The necessary logistical and administrative steps have been put in place to allow this to be introduced and it is expected to be operational in the coming weeks. Briefings and training are currently underway by both offices to residents and managers alike. I am delighted that this now gives effect to one of the key recommendations of the Report of the Working



Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and other supports for Asylum Seekers.

The type of complaints that will be accepted will be those relating to the services provided to protection applicants in their State provided accommodation centre. Complaints relating to the international protection process itself will not fall within this arrangement.

### Voluntary Sector Funding

67. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by her Department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and-or streams; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15686/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the following amounts were allocated by my Department and by Agencies under my remit to Voluntary and Community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and in the two months to the end of February 2017.

Funding Scheme	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (end Feb)
Promotion of Equality	€3.3m	€1.9m	€1.5m	€1.3m	€0.6m	€3.5m	€1.1m
COSC - Domestic Violence	€1.1m	€1m	€0.6m	€0.8m	€1m	€0.7m	€0.15m
Migrant Integration	€2m	€2.2m	€2.3m	€1.7m	€1.7m	€0.9m	€0.19m
Victims of Crime	€1.2m	€1.2m	€1.3m	€1.2m	€1.4m	€1.4m	€0.7m
Probation Projects	€9m	€9.8m	€9.2m	€9.7m	€9.4m	€10m	€2.2m
Youth Diversion	€16.7m	€16.6m	€16.7m	€16.8m	€17.4m	€18.7m	€3.5m
Total	€33.3m	€32.7m	€31.6m	€31.5m	€31.5m	€35.2m	€7.64m

### Departmental Reports

68. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on progress in implementing the recommendation of the report of the inter-departmental working group on fuller working lives to provide guidance material to employers on the use of fixed term contracts beyond normal retirement age; if she has raised the matter with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission; the response she has received from it; if work has commenced on the production of these materials; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15719/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy is aware, the Interdepartmental Working Group on Fuller Working Lives was chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; an official from the Equality Division of my Department participated in that Group along with representatives of other relevant Departments. The Interdepartmental Working Group issued its report in August 2016 and, in that report, made a number of recommendations.

The Interdepartmental Working Group’s report recommended that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) issue guidance in relation to the use of fixed term contracts beyond normal retirement age. The Interdepartmental Working Group also recommended that

the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) prepare a code of practice under section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 in the context of longer working.

Following discussions between my Department and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) which arose as a result of the above recommendations, it was agreed that the most appropriate way to offer guidance in this matter to employees and employers would be for IHREC to develop a Code of Practice under section 31 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 in relation to possible age discrimination in the context of retirement.

As the Deputy can appreciate, it is important that the IHREC and WRC issues set out above be treated in a manner that reflects their complementarity and that there be no duplication of efforts in this regard. I am advised that the IHREC has engaged with the WRC with a view to ensuring that there is no unnecessary overlap between their respective work in this area. I am informed that it is anticipated that these discussions and the WRC's consultations with stakeholders on the approach to the recommendations for which it is responsible are nearing completion and I look forward to receiving the IHREC's proposals for a Code of Practice as soon as the IHREC has considered the best approach and completed its own subsequent consultations with stakeholders.

### **Garda Procedures**

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the rules or protocols regarding the search of children in Garda custody, including strip searches. [15721/17]

70. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce an appropriate adult system, whether through legislation or regulation, for children and other vulnerable persons in Garda custody. [15722/17]

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the rules or protocols regarding the treatment of children in Garda custody, including interview protocol, provision of information and so on. [15723/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 to 71, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that the Criminal Justice Act, 1984 (Treatment of Persons in Custody in Garda Síochána Stations) Regulations 1987, as amended, provide a detailed statutory framework governing the treatment of persons in Garda custody. A key element of this framework is the requirement on members of An Garda Síochána, in carrying out their functions in relation to persons in custody, to act with due respect for the personal rights of those persons and their dignity as human persons, and to have regard for the special needs of any of them who may be under a physical or mental disability.

Part 6 of the Children Act 2001 is specifically concerned with the treatment of child suspects in Garda Síochána stations. It deals with issues including the detention of a child in a Garda station, notification of parents and guardians, contacting a solicitor and where necessary the HSE, and interviewing a child. The 1987 Regulations also contain provisions governing the treatment of children in Garda custody and these are consistent with the requirements of the 2001 Act.

A key protection for children is the requirement on the member in charge of the station where the child is in custody to inform an appropriate adult that the child is in custody and to request that adult to attend at the station. In circumstances where the member in charge is unable

to communicate with a parent or guardian, or where the parent or guardian indicates that he or she cannot or will not attend at the station, the child is entitled to have an adult relative or other adult reasonably named by him or her informed that he or she is in custody and be requested to attend at the Garda station. Failing this, the member in charge must ensure that an appropriate adult, other than a member of An Garda Síochána, attends.

A child may not be questioned or requested to make a written statement unless he or she is in the presence of a parent, guardian or other appropriate adult.

There are also specific rules governing searches. For example, a person in custody cannot be searched by a person, other than a doctor, of the opposite sex. Where a search involves removal of clothing, other than outer garments, no person of the opposite sex can be present unless either that person is a doctor or the member in charge considers that the presence of that person is necessary by reason of the violent conduct of the person to be searched. Where a search involves the removal of underclothing, it will normally be carried out by a doctor.

Every person in custody is provided at the outset with a document explaining the custody processes and setting out the rights of the persons including in relation to:

- legal advice;
- medical treatment;
- telephone calls and personal visits;
- searches; provision of meals;
- the taking of photographs, fingerprints and other bodily samples.

### **Visa Applications**

72. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the documentation and other requirements a Syrian national would be required to provide in order to obtain a category C visitor's visa for 90 days to visit family here, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15728/17]

**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 visa application procedures for a short-stay visa (category C) for Syrian nationals are the same as applies to all other visa required nationalities. The applicant must submit an application through the on-line visa application system which can be found on the INIS website and the websites of all Irish consular missions abroad.

Applicants must then pay the visa application fee and forward to the relevant processing office their passport, a signed copy of a summary sheet of the on-line application, proof of payment of the fee, and all other required documents. Instructions about where to pay, documents required, and where to send all documentation are provided on the summary sheet which is generated from the on-line process. Comprehensive information on the application process is available on the INIS website at [http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Visit%20\(Family%20Friends\)](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Visit%20(Family%20Friends)).

As with any visa application, each application is assessed individually based on its own merits and having regard to all the information put forward for consideration.

## Departmental Contracts Data

73. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of private investigation firms hired by her Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied her Department with a report on completion of their work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15741/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I can confirm that there were no private investigation firms hired by my Department during the period referred to by the Deputy.

## Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

74. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Finance the supports available through his Department to persons with disabilities or limited mobility who wish to buy a car or adapt an existing car to hoist and transport a wheelchair or mobility scooter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15545/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides repayment or remission of VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car or vehicle for the transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, exemption from motor tax in respect of that vehicle, and a fuel grant (up to a certain limit). To qualify for the scheme, the individual must be in receipt of a Primary Medical Certificate.

The general amount of VRT and VAT relief available for drivers and passengers with disabilities is: Drivers up to a maximum of €10,000; Passengers up to a maximum of €16,000.

In addition a category of specifically adapted vehicle is provided for drivers with disabilities who have made significant adaptations to their vehicles. This category provides VRT and VAT relief of up to €16,000 for the purchase of such vehicles. The vehicle must be held for 3 years before resale.

Finally, a category of 'extensively adapted vehicles' is provided for individuals with disabilities that require extensive modifications to their vehicles, so that the cost of modifications exceeds the cost of the vehicle itself. The VAT and VRT relief in respect of such vehicles is €22,000. The vehicle must be held for 6 years before resale.

The fuel grant available is 59c per litre of petrol and 48c per litre of diesel up to a maximum of 2730 litres per annum.

Full details of the Scheme, including the legislative criteria which must be met, are set out in Information Leaflet VRT 7. The Informational Leaflet can be found at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/leaflets/drivers-passengers-with-disabilities-tax-relief-scheme.pdf>.

## Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

75. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the delay in an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) with the National Rehabilitation Hospital. [15656/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Medical Board of Appeal that as of March 2017, there are 278 appeals active at the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal. There has been a recent upsurge in the number of appeals to the DDBMA. The DDBMA, within its functions, has the facility to deal with waiting lists by holding extra hearings. I am aware that extra hearings were held in 2016 and already in 2017 in this regard.

I am confident that the Board has the matter in hand but I will keep the matter under review. I would point out that Regulation 6(1)(e) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

### Pension Levy Yield

76. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount received through the levy introduced on private pension funds on a yearly basis; the amount he had originally planned to raise through this tax; his plans to return the excess amount collected or the total amount collected to the private pension funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15548/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by Revenue that the yield and the Budget estimates from the Stamp Duty levy on pension schemes for all relevant years is as set in the following table.

Year	Yield €m	Budget Estimate €m
2011	463	470
2012	483	463
2013	535	482
2014	743	670
2015	169	148
Total	2,393	2,233

The Stamp Duty levy on pension schemes was 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. While the Stamp Duty levy on pension schemes has ceased, I have no plans to repay the pension fund levies collected 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 have continued in Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 to reduce the tax burden on low and middle income earners.

### Bank Branch Closures

77. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will prevent the closures of banks (details supplied); if he has met with officials regarding the latest announcement of closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15615/17]

78. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn

to the widespread concerns in many rural communities due to the decision of a bank (details supplied) to close branches in Arva and Cootehill, County Cavan, and Carrickmacross, County Monaghan; if he will raise with the bank the need to review these decisions in view of the serious losses to local towns resulting from the closure of such banking facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15632/17]

79. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the contact he had with a bank (details supplied) regarding the announcement of branch closures and jobs losses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15646/17]

80. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the impact of branch closures of a bank (details supplied) on the availability of banking services to persons here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15647/17]

81. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance if he will meet with the Financial Services Union regarding the branch closures and job losses announced in a bank (details supplied). [15648/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 81, inclusive, together.

I note with regret that Ulster Bank is closing a significant number of branches with considerable negative impacts on both staff and customers alike. That said, the bank's continued commitment to the Irish market is to be welcomed. Officials of the bank briefed my officials on this issue last week.

I understand that employee representatives have been kept informed and that it is hoped that the staff reductions can be achieved on a voluntary basis by agreement.

The Irish Government has no formal role in the commercial decisions of Ulster Bank, these are a matter for the Board and Management of the Bank and its parent company, RBS.

That said, I expect that Ulster Bank will do everything that it can to mitigate the impacts of these branch closures on local communities. I also expect that the bank will ensure that customers are kept informed about developments and provided with the appropriate assistance to move branches, switch to other banks and avail of alternative means of accessing financial services. I am not aware of any request from the Financial Services Union to meet with me or my officials at this point in time.

The continued presence of a viable and active Ulster Bank in the Irish market will be important in fostering competition for banking services. It is vital that businesses and consumers have a range of banking options available when using financial services and accessing credit and that they continually assess their options to ensure that they are getting the best value and service possible.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15737/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In response to the Deputy's question,

I am advised that my Department has not hired any private investigation firms in the past five years and to date in 2017.

### Schools Building Projects Status

83. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new development (details supplied); the works expected to take place in 2017; if staff have been notified of this; if so, the latest notification they have received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15592/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The building project to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - detailed design stage, which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured. The school and its Design Team are currently completing the Stage 2(b) submission which the Board of Management will then submit to my Department for review. When the Stage 2(b) has been reviewed my Department will revert to the school at that time with a timeframe for the further progression of the project to tender stage.

As the Board of Management of the school is the client for the building project responsibility rests with the Board of Management in the first instance to keep staff and parents informed of progress relating to the school building project.

### Further Education and Training Programmes

84. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15670/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I understand from SOLAS that there is a fulltime Textile and Floor Covering Installer programme currently operating in a number of Education and Training Board (ETB) training centres. The aim of this programme is to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and competence to install carpet and vinyl floor covering independently or under direction in both commercial and domestic settings. Full details of this programme is available on [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie).

Employers in the sector can contact their local ETB to discuss the possibility of delivering this programme in their region, should sufficient demand exist.

### School Transport Eligibility

85. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school bus ticket will be provided to a person (details supplied). [15712/17]

**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 in the region of 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.

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

The child in question is not eligible for school transport and may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service.

In this regard, Bus Éireann has advised that the family applied late for school transport and as the service is currently operating to capacity no additional tickets can be issued.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

### **Departmental Properties**

86. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a college (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15541/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership but rather in the ownership of Údarás na Gaeltachta. My Department has no current plans for the use of this building. Arrangements in relation to its potential alternative uses, its retention or sale are a matter for Údarás na Gaeltachta as the property owner.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

87. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will sanction a summer works scheme application for a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; his views on whether this school is in exceptional circumstances; if as a result of these circumstances he will sanction summer works without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15542/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 10 application, external environment project, under the Summer Works Scheme (2016 and 2017) from the school to which he refers.

Nearly 50% of schools (including the school in question) have applied for inclusion under the 2016-17 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 the 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 the Department's website. The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

In the meantime, it is also open to the school to use its minor works grant to carry out high priority works at their school in full or on a phased basis, as that grant permits.



## **Schools Refurbishment**

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the funding application by a school (details supplied) for additional classroom space; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15552/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that funding was approved by my Department for the provision of additional classroom and resource teaching accommodation at the school referred to by the Deputy.

The school authority has since contacted my Department seeking to significantly revise the scope of the building project approved. My Department will be in contact with the school authority concerned in the matter shortly.

## **School Playgrounds**

89. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are grants available for a school (details supplied) in County Wexford to construct a playground in its grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15557/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the works referred to are eligible to be considered for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, the purpose of which is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to facilitate carrying out small and medium scale works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings and the grounds within the school site area. My Department has no record of receiving an application from the school in question under the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2016 and 2017.

The school may use its minor works grant, which all primary schools received last November, to carry out works in full or on a phased basis, as that grant permits, if the school considers the works to be a priority.

## **Education and Training Provision**

90. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of negotiations (details supplied); when talks are likely to conclude; when this facility will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15580/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB). I have asked CMETB to respond directly to the Deputy.

## **Third Level Funding**

91. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the core funding for each institute of technology and university in each of the years 2008 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15585/17]

92. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of core funding spent on pay by each institute of technology and university in each of the years

2008 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15586/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

All of the information requested by the Deputy is not currently available in my Department. Officials of my Department have requested the information from the Higher Education Authority and I will arrange for the information to be sent to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Intellectual Property Protocol**

93. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to an internal review under way in a third level institution in respect of intellectual property policies and procedures; the institution and the nature of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15587/17]

94. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a conflict of interest arising for senior personnel in third and fourth level institutes due to their employment, business or professional interest, including shareholdings, directorships and professional relationships; if he is satisfied that such conflicts are being appropriately managed in line with IP protocols as set out by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15588/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

The Deputy will be aware that as a country, Ireland has invested significantly in building research capacity in strategic areas allied to industry needs. This includes investment in top quality researchers, physical infrastructure, equipment and structures to commercialise research.

Investment in research is a key element of overall enterprise policy and seeks to drive innovation and competitiveness in business and the public sector and enable the creation of sustainable jobs. Higher education institutions are central to the delivery of this ambition.

In that context, the national IP Protocol “Putting public research to work in Ireland” was developed by a task group comprised of leaders from industry, the investment community and TTOs in 2012. The new protocol built on earlier guidelines and codes of practice, using the lessons learned from their use.

In 2013 the Government established a centralised function with responsibility for technology transfer in the State which led to the creation of Knowledge Transfer Ireland, launched in May 2014. Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI) now has responsibility for setting direction for research performing organisations (RPOs) best practice to enable compliance with IP policy and procedures.

The publication of the national IP protocol in 2012, and its subsequent refresh in 2016, sought to establish policy and guidelines on the interactions between industry and Ireland’s Higher Education Institutes, including the treatment of intellectual property. It provides guidelines and sets expectations for the RPOs and for industry.

The national IP Protocol 2016 comprises two volumes:

- the National IP Protocol policy document which sets out the framework underpinning research collaboration and access to intellectual property from state-funded research

- the IP Protocol Resource Guide which provides an overview of the national IP management guidelines and links to resources and template documents, available for industry and RPOs. It also provides an overview of the knowledge transfer structures in Ireland and the kinds of agreements that can be used to formalise research-industry engagements.

The protocol explains the National IP Management Requirements and requires that RPOs have in place and operate internal IP management systems that meet or exceed these. The protocol also includes “good practice” that will normally be followed. However, industry and RPOs are free to adopt a different approach where this is in the best interests of successful relationships and research commercialisation. Practices are also highlighted that may be followed if industry/RPOs choose to do so.

The IP Protocol is a key reference source for Ireland’s HEIs and research funders. HEIs have developed IP policies that are in line with national guidelines and good practice. These will include policy on spin-out formation. The detail of policies will differ amongst institutions.

The research funding agencies for the publicly funded research system all require that the higher education institutions own the intellectual property arising from research projects that they fund. Each University and IoT has a set of policies that cover how they will govern the use of that IP.

The national IP Protocol explains that commercialisation may benefit HEIs and provide incentives to the researchers involved in creating IP. IP may include protectable IP and know-how. Furthermore, the national IP management requirements make provision for HEIs to have in place a system for sharing of income from commercialising within the organisation, including with relevant researchers.

It is international practice that researchers may hold shares in spin-out companies. The national IP Protocol makes it clear that HEIs should have policies and procedures in place that minimise or manage potential or actual conflicts of interest concerning the commercialisation of IP.

The IP Protocol (National IP Management Requirements) refers to conflict of interest as it applies to commercialisation of IP.

The national IP Protocol is clear on the policy and processes to identify, protect and commercialise IP that arises in HEIs. This includes guidance on licensing of IP. A suite of Model Agreements, available for use if HEIs and companies choose, covering a range of IP licensing scenarios is available on the KTI website.

In addition, all HEIs are requested yearly as part of their governance statements to state that a code of conduct for Governing Body members and a Code of Conduct for Employees has been adopted and is being monitored. Guidelines for these codes are included in the IOT and University Codes of Governance (section 3.2).

The University Code of Governance has been implemented since 2007 and was updated in 2012. A copy of the code is available here:

*[http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/university\\_code\\_of\\_governance\\_2012.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/university_code_of_governance_2012.pdf)*

The Institutes of Technology Code of Governance published in 2012 replaces an earlier document published in 2003. A copy of the code is available here:

*[http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/code\\_of\\_governance\\_jan\\_2012final\\_updated\\_0.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/code_of_governance_jan_2012final_updated_0.pdf)*

At institutional level, the Code of Conduct for employees and members of governing authorities would include statements related to conflict of interest and outside employment.

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.

As I have previously indicated to the Deputy, I have not been informed of occasions where breaches of policy have occurred.

As the Deputy is aware, a review is underway in Waterford Institute of Technology. The purpose of the review is to establish if the institution's interests have been appropriately represented and protected, that all relevant policies, protocols and procedures have been complied with and satisfactory governance processes have been applied. Once finalised this review will be presented to the Governing Body.

### **Youth Employment Initiative**

95. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if moneys allocated to the State under the youth employment initiative allocation had to be reimbursed to the European Commission; if so, the amount of the reimbursement; the reasons for the reimbursement; if his Department's attention was drawn to the requirement in order to access funding upon making an application; if there was a delay in getting the system up and running; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15589/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL) that was adopted by Commission Decision in February 2015. The YEI allocation for Ireland of €68m is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m.

The ESF Regulations provide for initial pre-financing/advances of EU support at 1% (or 1.5% for Member States under financial assistance in 2014 and 2015) of the full programme support, payable for each year from 2014 to 2016, together with annual pre-financing of between 2% and 3% payable from 2016 to 2023. In May 2015 an amendment to the relevant EU Regulations resulted in an unprecedented increase in the YEI advances to be paid to Member States. The Commission subsequently released pre-financing payments from the dedicated YEI budget line, worth 30% of the YEI budget, to provide additional financial liquidity to support YEI implementation. However, the relevant Regulations specified that where a Member State did not submit an interim payment application by 23 May 2016 for at least 50% of the additional pre-financing amount, that the Member State must reimburse the Commission the total YEI pre-financing contribution. The ESF regulations also provide that annual pre-financing for any year in which an interim payment application is not made in that year must also be reimbursed.

As 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, Ireland did not comply with the requirement to submit an interim YEI payment application by the due date. Accordingly, €19.8m additional pre-financing received was reimbursed to the Commission. Furthermore, as there was no ESF application made in 2016, the €11.6m annual pre-financing for 2016, including €1.36m for the YEI, will be offset against the 2017 pre-financing due.

The reimbursement of these amounts has not resulted in any loss of EU monies to the Exchequer. The YEI 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 other actions originally selected for YEI funding, are the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; JobBridge; JobsPlus Incentive Scheme; Tús; Youthreach, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Momentum. 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.

### **Departmental Properties**

96. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his Department's ownership of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15599/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The property to which the Deputy refers is in my ownership. It was agreed as part of the discussions on the property acquisition that my Department would facilitate the occupation of the current schools on the campus during their wind-down period.

### **School Closures**

97. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the official timeline for phasing out a school (details supplied); his plans for providing four extra classrooms for a school (details supplied) over the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15600/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that, in respect of the first school referred to, my Department was advised by the Patron of the decision to close the school. The closure arrangements to apply in the case of this school are a matter for the school's Patron. In this regard, the school Patron has advised that it is intended to close the school on a phased basis to 2019 so as to enable the current cohort of post-primary students to complete their current cycle of Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate during the wind-down period.

In regard to the second school referenced by the Deputy, my Department is currently examining the options for the temporary accommodation required over the next two years for the school concerned.

### **Site Acquisitions**

98. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the land acquisition for access to the site of a new school building at a school (details supplied) between stakeholders; if contracts have been exchanged; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [15601/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has continued to progress matters with both the landowners and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in relation to a suitable access for the permanent building of a primary school on the site of the school to which the Deputy refers.

Due to the complexity of issues it is not possible to indicate a timeline for the completion of the acquisition. As commercial sensitivities apply to property acquisitions generally, my Department is not in a position to provide further details at this time.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

99. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of services for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15614/17]

**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](http://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](http://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.

### **Teacher Retirements**

100. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be permitted to defer their pension and lump sum to allow them to remain in employment after 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15619/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The individual to whom the Deputy refers is a primary school teacher and is a member of the Primary Schools Teacher Superannuation 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 subsequent filling of that vacant post is a matter for the school authorities' with due regard to the rules for recruitment of teachers as laid down by my Department.

Pension benefits for the individual become payable from the date of retirement, which I

understand in this case is from 1 September 2017.

So while the individual concerned may not remain a member of the pension scheme should she return to employment in the education sector or in the public sector in general her pension benefits will be abated in accordance with the rules of the pension scheme.

This in general terms means should her pension benefits (not including her lump sum) plus her salary exceed the final retirement salary (uprated to current rates) then her pension benefits will be reduced by the excess.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

101. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the school community at a school (details supplied) with regard to the move by his Department in respect of the school losing a special education teaching post which will negatively impact on the whole school; if he will review the new model introduced by his Department; if he will provide assistance to this school community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15631/17]

103. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will re-examine the decision to reduce the number of resource teachers at a school (details supplied); his views on whether the new model of allocating resource teachers is unfair due to the component of complex needs being based on one year only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15673/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 103 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, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, 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.

For the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE 'Low Incidence' allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new model for each school. This has ensured that the most up to date data on the distribution of pupils in this category across the school system has been used.

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.

In relation to the particular school referred to by the Deputy in his question, this school had a General Allocation Model allocation of 50 hours for the 2016/17 school year, which combined with 30.18 resource teaching hours allocated to the school by the National Council for Special Education, gave a total allocation to the school of 80.18 additional teaching hours for the 2016/17 school year.

As the profiled allocation for the school did not indicate an increased allocation requirement for the school for 2017/18, the school has maintained its existing level of allocation.

The special education teaching allocation for this school for 2017/18 is 80.18 hours.

There has therefore been no reduction to the special education teaching allocation for this school.

Schools must notify the Department on Form S.E.T.Cluster 2017, Appendix D of the primary Staffing Schedule, of their clustering arrangements for their new Special Education allocation.

Completed forms should be returned to the Department's Primary Teacher Allocations Section as soon as possible but no later than close of business on 30th March 2017.

S.E.T. hours that are clustered into new full-time permanent posts and received before this deadline will be automatically approved by the Department. Schools that do not return the completed form within the above timeframe or where all of a school's S.E.T hours are not clustered into full-time posts will be included, as appropriate, in the Department led clustering process.

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.

The NCSE has announced the commencement of an independent appeals process through which schools may appeal the allocation made to their school if they believe the data upon which the allocation is based is incorrect or has been incorrectly used.

### **Site Acquisitions**

102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans to secure a site for a school (details supplied). [15671/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Officials in my Department are currently liaising with the school authorities in relation to the provision of a permanent accommodation solution for the school to which the Deputy refers. Once a preferred solution has been identified, my Department will work to advance the project as expeditiously as possible.

*Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 101.*

### **National Educational Psychological Service**

104. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a NEPS assessment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15710/17]

**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 assigned psychologist.

### **Departmental Reports**

105. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on implementing the recommendation of the report of the interdepartmental working group on fuller working lives to develop appropriate solutions tailored to the needs of older workers in order to support them to remain attached to the workforce for as long as possible and to reskill or upskill from occupations in which they may no longer be in a position to remain; if he has raised the matter with SOLAS and the education and training boards; the response he has received from them; if work has commenced on the development of these solutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15720/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Within the education sector, there are a range of actions in place as well as a number being developed to support the skill needs of older workers, to enable them to remain attached to the workforce for as long as possible and to meet the evolution of Ireland's education system to one that fully supports lifelong learning as envisaged by the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

This year, I increased funding to Skillnets Limited by over 10% to enable it to deliver over 43,000 training places for those in employment, in a range of sectors and regions across over 63 training networks who will identify training needs and source provision to ensure it is aligned to the needs of workers and enterprise.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 sets out the vision that Ireland will be recognised by the quality of its workforce and has set a target to increase lifelong learning to 15% by 2025.

In that context, my Department and SOLAS agreed last year, to develop a policy framework for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector to guide activity undertaken by the sector to support employee development in Ireland. Work on the framework, which has involved consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, is nearing completion. Under the Action Plan for Education 2017, it along with an implementation plan is scheduled for publication in Q2 2017

Goal 2 of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 which relates to active inclusion aims to support the active inclusion of individuals of all ages and abilities to participate in further education and training (FET) to enable every citizen to fully participate in society.

Examples of actions currently taking place within the sector to support the active inclusion of all learners include:

- Introduction of new part-time programmes as well as timetabling study and ICT skills and academic literacy support across all level 3 and 4 provision;

- Increased flexibility in course provision to suit the lives of all learners, including weekend, evening, part-time provision as well as full-time;

- Enhanced pre-assessment policies and procedures to support the identification of best fit programmes and award levels for all;

- Development of learner engagement programmes, designed to meet the needs of persons

most removed from the education/training environment, affording participants the opportunity to engage in active learning in an environment that is welcoming and supportive of their learning needs.

- Launched last year, the further education and training course hub (FETCH) which is available at [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie) provides prospective learners with information on almost 6,000 FET programmes being provided throughout the country.

My Department will continue to work with its agencies and other Government Departments to support older workers to remain attached to the workforce through the provision of high quality flexible education and training opportunities.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

106. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15735/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has not incurred any expenditure in respect of the use of private investigations firms during the period in question.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

107. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will alter plans regarding social housing delivered by the private sector after it emerged that only 64 social units were delivered in 2015; his views on whether 2016 figures will not improve significantly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15609/17]

**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 following the outcome of an independent review, which included a consultation process. The amendments, effective from 1 September 2015, sought to maximise the contribution Part V can make to social housing supply and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country.

It is anticipated that over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, at least 4,700 new social homes will be delivered through the Part V mechanism. My Department will keep the position under review, through closely monitoring the supply of housing generally and the options housing providers use for delivering on their Part V obligations.

With regard to delivery of units under Part V to date, it should be noted that Part V applies only to developments of 10 or more houses, and therefore does not apply to one-off houses or schemes of 9 or fewer houses. It should also be noted that the provision of land rather than houses remains the default position if the developer wishes to exercise that option. In addition, some developments completed in 2015 and 2016 may have been subject to older Part V agreements made before 1 September 2015, when other options - such as a financial contribution, the provision of fully or partially serviced sites or the provision of land elsewhere in the functional area of the planning authority - were available.

## Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

108. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason local authority tenants are exempt from purchasing their house while receiving social welfare payments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15677/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, 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 1 year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

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

In line with the commitment given 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 the scheme's operation is currently being undertaken by my Department. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage will be brought forward. I expect this review to be completed shortly.

## Voluntary Sector Funding

109. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by his Department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and-or streams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15682/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department provides funding to community and voluntary organisations through a number of funding schemes. These include the Scheme to Support National Organisations, the Funding Scheme for members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the Seniors Alert Scheme, as well as a funding stream to support volunteer centres, volunteer information services and a number of national volunteer-supporting organisations such as Volunteer Ireland. The funding provided each year from 2011 to 2016 and allocated in 2017 under each funding scheme is outlined in the table.

*Questions - Written Answers*

-	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 Al- location
	€'000s	€'000s	€'000s	€'000s	€'000s	€'000s	€'000s
Scheme to Support National Organisations	3,863	3,761	3,634	4,324	5,342	5,842	5,921
Community & Voluntary Pillar Funding Scheme	540	600	615	565	565	565	565
Seniors Alert Scheme	2,436	2,524	2,321	1,706	1,539	1,800	2,300
Volunteering	3,139	3,094	2,840	2,636	3,129	3,157	3,500

### Departmental Contracts Data

110. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15736/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department did not hire any private investigation firms in the past five years, or to date in 2017.

### State Pension (Contributory)

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a €5 increase will be applied to a social protection payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15574/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The pension payment increases announced in Budget 2016 in respect of widow's/widower's and surviving civil partners contributory pension were effective from 10 March 2017 for recipients aged 66 years and over, and from 17 March 2017 for recipients aged under 66.

The person concerned correctly received their €5 weekly increase with effect from 17 March 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Job Losses

112. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to meet with employees at a bank (details supplied); the supports his Department can offer in this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15618/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As with all persons who find themselves in the unfortunate position of losing their employment, any affected bank employees should contact their local Intreo centre or Social Welfare Branch Office where they will receive advice on jobseekers payments and other income supports.

Where practical, the Department can make arrangements with an employer to actually visit the business premises and talk to affected staff, in advance of any redundancy. This may help

those at risk of losing their jobs to fast-track any claim for jobseekers benefit.

In the case of the bank in question, as it is not clear where the redundancies will be situated, the Department may seek to inform bank staff of the availability of an online application process for jobseekers benefit via *MyWelfare.ie*.

To avail of the online application process, jobseekers need to have a Public Services Card and a verified mobile phone. They are then able to register for online services with *MyGOVid.ie* and can apply for jobseekers payments online without having to visit an Intreo centre and make an appointment.

Once customers are in receipt of a jobseekers payment, advice and support will also be provided on job searching, as well as any relevant education and training options that may be beneficial to the customer in their endeavours to return to the workforce.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff**

113. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there will be an increase in the number of community welfare officers employed in the Drogheda Intreo centre in view of the recent closure of clinics (details supplied), all of which will see an increase in the already large volume of work the officers have in the Drogheda office. [15636/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Duleek and Laytown clinic is being relocated to Drogheda Intreo Centre from 3 April 2017.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

The community welfare service claimload for Drogheda, Duleek and Laytown areas has reduced by over 20% during the period March 2016 to March 2017. The claimload includes basic supplementary welfare allowance, rent supplement, exceptional needs payment and other supplements provided under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme. People claiming supports under SWA generally only interact with the Department on an occasional basis, for example, when seeking an exceptional needs payment or in claiming additional supports such as rent supplement, which are usually reviewed once to twice yearly.

Since 2013 the demand for community welfare services in these areas has reduced by 60% in line with the economic recovery. The reduction in the number of SWA recipients can be attributed to improved processing times in determining entitlement to weekly social welfare schemes, the overall reduction in the Live Register and the general improvement in the economy.

In this regard local management is satisfied that the team in Drogheda Intreo Centre is sufficiently resourced to continue to deliver a quality customer service. My officials will continue to monitor claim loads and staffing levels across all services in Drogheda, South Louth and East Meath.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. I know that you have been in contact with my office and officials on this matter. If you require any further clarity on this issue please do not hesitate to contact my office again.

### **Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility**

114. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person who, in the relevant year, was both self-employed and employed as a PAYE worker and made 52 paid S class contributions and in excess of 13 paid A class contributions, would have an entitlement to jobseeker's benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15729/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** To qualify for jobseeker's benefit a person must satisfy certain contribution conditions. The first condition is a person must have at least 104 reckonable contributions (classes A, H or P) paid since they entered insurable employment. Class S self-employed contributions are not reckonable for jobseeker's benefit purposes.

To satisfy the second condition, a person must have at least 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the Governing Contribution Year (GCY). Of these, 13 of the contributions must be paid or the person must have at least 26 reckonable contributions paid in both the GCY and the year immediately preceding it (the GCY is the second last complete contribution year - 01 January to 31 December - before the year in which the claim is made).

If a person has not 13 paid contributions in the relevant GCY, they must have the 13 contributions paid in either of the two tax years before the relevant GCY or the last complete tax year or the current tax year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

115. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15743/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department does not hire private investigation firms and has not hired any for the period in question.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

116. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15738/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** No private investigation firms have been hired by my Department in the past five years and to date in 2017.

### **Public Private Partnerships Data**

117. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the contractual capital value of PPPs entered into to date; the expenditure pre-2016 on these projects; the unitary payments made in 2016; and the outstanding commitments at end 2016. [15642/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I should first explain that financial responsibility for individual PPP projects rests with the relevant Sponsoring Agency. My Department's role in relation to PPPs is to facilitate the PPP process centrally by developing the general policy framework (including, where necessary, the legal framework) within which PPPs operate and by providing central guidance to Departments and other State Authorities in that context.

My Department publishes a full suite of guidance to facilitate the PPP process, which is available on the Central PPP Unit's website at *www.ppp.gov.ie*. The website also contains details collected by my Department from Sponsoring Agencies on the contractual capital value, unitary payments and future commitments for individual PPP and concession projects up to end 2015. These returns show:

Contractual capital value at end 2015: €4.9bn

Unitary Payments made to 2015: €2.3bn

Future commitments at end 2015: €6.7bn

My Department is currently collating the 2016 figures with the assistance of the various Sponsoring Agencies and will publish the updated data on the PPP website as soon as it is finalised. However, provisional figures indicate that unitary payments made in 2016 amount to circa €192m.

### Departmental Contracts Data

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15742/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In response to the Deputy's question, my Department has not hired any private investigation firms over the past five years.

### Post Office Network

119. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will consider exploring the option of giving the post office service responsibility for the compilation of the electoral register and enumeration of census data to make the service more viable in view of the urgent crisis in the delivery of postal services; if she will include this in the list of extra tasks being considered for the post office network on foot of the report of the post office hub working group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15633/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring):** In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, I established the Post Office Hub Working Group last year to identify potential models under which the post offices could act as community hubs, especially in rural areas. The Group's report has been finalised and it was submitted to, and noted by, the Government this week.



The issue of compiling the electoral register and enumeration of census data did not arise in the course of the Working Group's deliberations. The Local Authorities are responsible for compiling the electoral register for their respective areas, while issues relating to Census enumeration are a matter for the Central Statistics Office.

### **Departmental Schemes**

120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if applications are still being accepted for the town and village renewal scheme; if not, when this scheme will be accepting new applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15641/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Towns and villages are at the heart of our rural communities and the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that the renewal of towns and villages can play an important role in revitalising rural Ireland. Last year, therefore, I launched a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme, with funding of €10 million, to start the process 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.

The 2016 Scheme is now closed and approximately 170 applications were approved for funding across the country.

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 shortly, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. The scheme will be administered through the Local Authorities and full details of the scheme, including the timeframe for accepting applications, will be made available when the scheme is launched.

I also intend to launch a second phase of the scheme later this year, which will involve 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.

### **Post Office Network**

121. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she will take to ensure that rural post offices remain open and functioning in view of the difficult financial position of An Post. [15654/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring):** The postal sector is undergoing significant change both nationally and internationally, with the increased use of electronic communications leading to a 38% decline in core mail volume for An Post from its peak in 2007. In recent years, there has also been a 17% decline in Department of Social Protection payments and a 20% reduction in Billpay transactions, both of which are key revenue lines for the post office network.

While these are ultimately commercial matters for the Board and management of An Post as a commercial State body, the Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to find solutions to support the ongoing sustainability of the post office network in the changing business environment in which they are operating.

For my own part, I established the Post Office Hub Working Group last year to identify potential models under which the post offices could act as community hubs, especially in rural areas. The Group's report has been finalised and I submitted it to Government for noting this week.

The Post Office Hub Working Group considered that a Shared Value Post Office model has the most potential to expand the type of services which post offices could offer to customers. The Group's report recommends that this model be tested through the establishment of pilots in four locations, with a view to rolling the model out to up to 150 locations if proven to be successful.

### **Rural Development Plan**

122. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she expects applications to open for the rural renewal schemes, specifically CLÁR; the amount of funding allocated to each of the schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15676/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23 January last, contains a number of measures which have the objective of supporting the rejuvenation of rural Ireland, including the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Recreation Infrastructure scheme, and the CLÁR programme. The aim of all of these measures is to make rural Ireland, including its towns, villages and townlands, more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

As part of Budget 2017, I have secured the following levels of funding for CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal, and Rural Recreation Infrastructure:

- CLÁR Programme: €5 million
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme: €12 million
- Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme: €7 million

Minister of State Michael Ring, will be launching the 2017 CLÁR programme very shortly, and I will be launching the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in the coming weeks. Details of the Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme will also be announced soon.

To ensure the maximum impact of the rural support schemes, I am also exploring how best we can align them with other initiatives across Government which also support the rejuvenation of rural areas.

The Deputy should also note that the LEADER programme is now open for applications in all counties and contact details for the relevant delivery bodies can be found on my Department's website, at the following link: <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/app/uploads/2017/01/contact-details-of-local-action-groups.pdf>.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

123. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the

years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by her Department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and-or streams; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15684/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department operates a wide range of funding schemes across all areas of its remit. Details of these schemes, and announcements in respect of funding allocations are made available on my Department's website. Details of annual expenditure are also published each year in the Department's Annual Appropriation Account.

In view of the large number of schemes concerned it would not be practicable to provide a comprehensive list of amounts allocated to voluntary and community organisations in these years as requested by the Deputy. However, my Department would be happy to assist the Deputy with any specific requests in respect of individual schemes.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

124. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of private investigation firms hired by her Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied her Department with a report on completion of their work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15731/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am advised that no private investigation firms have been engaged by my Department in the past five years or to date in 2017 .

### **Mobility Allowance Review**

125. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health when the schemes devised to replace the mobility allowance grant and the motorised transport grant will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15547/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Programme for Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage and I anticipate that this will be brought to Government shortly. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;

- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The Deputy may be interested to note that people who previously benefitted from the now-closed Motorised Transport Grant, may, if they satisfy the criteria under that scheme, be eligible for tax relief under the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme. This scheme is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Finance and is operated by the Revenue Commissioners. Details of the scheme can be found on [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review**

126. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health when the review process of the fair deal scheme in respect of farmers will be concluded and its recommendations published; if the changes made to equalise the scheme for farmers will be legislated for by the next budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15550/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A financial assessment is carried out by the HSE to determine how much a participant in the Scheme will contribute to the cost of their care. The Programme for a Partnership Government has committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies, including the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. This work is currently underway. Once all of the relevant Review recommendations have been considered, any amendments required to the Scheme will be identified. Changes which require legislative implementation will be addressed collectively, and it is important to remember that the NHSS is largely underpinned by primary legislation.

### **Hospital Services**

127. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise, with regard to services in the paediatric unit and maternity unit arising from the recent meeting with regional management and staff in the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15544/17]

**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.

### Ambulance Service Data

128. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 616 of 7 March 2017, if he will ensure a reply issues as soon as possible [15549/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have been advised by the HSE that the National Ambulance Service are currently putting together the information sought by the Deputy and will be in a position to respond shortly.

### Nursing Home Services

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 22 March 2017, the person or body that a person working in a nursing home, who has concerns regarding abuse or malpractice, should direct their concerns for investigation in view of the fact that HIQA does not investigate individual concerns or complaints [15553/17]

130. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 22 March 2017, if it is standard practice for HIQA, upon receipt of an individual complaint outlining serious abuse and malpractice in a nursing home, to fail to inform the complainant that investigation of their concerns is outside of its remit and to also fail to advise that person as to the body to which they should direct their complaint in view of the fact that HIQA does not have the legal power to investigate individual concerns or complaints. [15554/17]

131. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of inspections of a nursing home (details supplied) performed by HIQA since October 2015. [15555/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 to 131, inclusive, together.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) welcomes information about designated centres for dependent persons, including nursing homes. HIQA informs all persons raising an issue of concern that the Authority does not have the legal remit to address individual cases relating to health and social care services. The individual is advised to directly contact the service provider in question, if they have not already done so, as service providers have a statutory responsibility to respond to complaints. The individual is also advised that HIQA reviews all information received about the safety and quality of services and uses this information to inform its on-going monitoring and enforcement programmes. Concerns can also be addressed to the Health Service Executive's *Your Service Your Say*, the HSE National Information Line, the

Office of the Ombudsman or a HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team, as appropriate. Further information on how to make a complaint or give feedback about health and social care services in Ireland can be found on [www.healthcomplaints.ie](http://www.healthcomplaints.ie).

Unannounced inspections of the nursing home in question were completed on 04 September 2015 and 09 March 2017. Once finalised, HIQA reports are published on the Authority's website [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie).

### **Hospital Facilities**

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the lack of an obstetric unit in UHK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15556/17]

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

### **Medical Card Applications**

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15559/17]

**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 Staff**

134. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce theatre technicians into the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15560/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE have established a working group with an independent chair, to conduct a comprehensive review of the role and function of the Health Care Assistant in the health service. This work will include a review of the HCA role in the perioperative setting (theatre assistants) amongst other key specialist areas. This working group will be representative of all relevant stakeholders including the Department of Health, HSE, INMO, SIPTU, and PHECC amongst others.

Terms of Reference for the Group are currently being finalised and the deliberations of the group will include giving detailed consideration to the scope of the various HCA roles.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

135. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of private beds in each public hospital in each month for the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15561/17]

**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.

### **Hospitals Data**

136. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries performed by speciality, by month and by hospital, for each of the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15562/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Over the last ten years, activity in acute hospitals has increased, with the total number of discharges for Inpatient and Day cases rising by 33.6 per cent, from 1,236,036 in 2006 to 1,651,338 in 2015.

It is important to recognise that, in order to improve efficiency in our hospital system, over the last number of years there has been a greater emphasis on increasing the number of procedures, previously carried out as inpatient procedures, which are now carried out on a daycase basis. Consequently, when comparing hospital elective activity for 2012 with 2016, it can be seen that, while inpatient elective discharges decreased, daycase discharges have increased.

In fact, taken together, elective inpatient discharges and daycase discharges increased from 1.02m in 2012 (full year) to 1.05m in 2016 (Jan to Nov). HSE data for 2016 to the end of November show that while elective inpatient discharges had reduced by 1.6% in comparison with the same period in 2015, daycase discharges increased by 1.9%.

In addition, when considering performance of the public acute hospital sector, emergency care should also be taken into account. 2016 data to the end of November, with respect to emergency inpatient discharges, showed an increase of 4.2% in comparison with the same period in 2015, while 2016 saw an increase in ED attendances of 4.6% over the equivalent period in 2015.

This Government is committed to improving access to, and enhancing, health services. This commitment is reflected in the allocation in 2017 of the highest ever health budget of €14.6 billion.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly to provide more details regarding the number of elective surgeries performed.

### **HSE Reports**

137. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to release immediately a report into complaints made by persons (details supplied); if he will direct

the HSE to present the report to the persons concerned in its original unedited format as delivered to the HSE on 7 February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15563/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Facilities**

138. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the class or model of helicopters that are licensed to land on hospital helipads or on hospital grounds; the situation with regard to a specific helicopter (details supplied); the number of landings for all type of helicopters that have occurred over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15568/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Medical Card Applications**

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15569/17]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Data**

140. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the percentage and number of general practitioners who have signed up to the free general practitioner cards for the under



sixes scheme, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15572/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As at 1st March 2017, 2,340 GPs had signed contracts with the HSE for the provision of services to children under six years of age. Approximately 94% of all GMS GPs have now signed under 6s contracts.

As a breakdown by county of the number of GPs who have signed contracts with the HSE is not routinely collected by my Department, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **General Practitioner Data**

141. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who have withdrawn from the free general practitioner care for the under-sixes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15573/17]

**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 Appointments Delays**

142. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not received an appointment; if he will expedite this request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15575/17]

**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 Care Professionals**

143. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the status of the regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors [15577/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Psychotherapists and counsellors are not currently regulated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. However, the Act provides that the Minister may, by regulation, designate a health and social care profession not already designated if he or she considers that it is appropriate and in the public interest to do so and if specified criteria have been met.

The regulation of a new profession under the Act involves a consultation process and the making of a number of statutory instruments by the Minister for Health and by the relevant

registration board.

In September of last year, the Department engaged in a formal consultation process in which interested persons and organisations were invited to formally submit their views on how the statutory regulation of the counsellors and psychotherapists should proceed. A total of 84 submissions were received by the closing date of 30th November 2016.

I am undertaking an examination of these submissions which will inform the approach to be adopted in progressing the statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors under the Act and I envisage that the next steps will commence in the coming months with the submission of draft designation regulations to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

144. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents who were admitted to the adult section of the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15578/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

145. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents who were admitted to adult psychiatric hospitals in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15579/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The HSE Service Plan 2017 has as one of its priorities the improvement of access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, including maximising placements in age appropriate acute units.

In regard to admission of child and adolescent cases to adult units, there has been significant progress on age appropriate admissions since 2008 when there were 247 such admissions to adult units in that year. This declined to 68 admissions in 2016, out of a total of 380 admissions of child and adolescents, despite increasing demands overall. The number of admissions does not necessarily equate to the actual number of children involved, as an individual child may be admitted on more than one occasion in any given year. There has to be some operational flexibility surrounding emergency placements in Adult Units, particularly where very short-term placements occur, and where full account is taken of all relevant factors such as the preferences of all those involved, or geographical factors relating to access or visiting. The HSE closely monitors on a weekly basis all child admissions to adult units, with a view to minimising these.

Additional resources over recent years means that we now have 67 CAMHS teams, and 3 Paediatric Liason Teams, supported by 66 operational CAMHS beds across the country. A lack of funding for the mental health care programme is not a difficulty at present for the HSE, but there are acknowledged staff recruitment and retention difficulties across the health care system, including CAMHS, that the Executive is addressing. A new Standard Operating Procedure introduced in June 2015 has provided greater clarity and consistency on how this specialist mental health service for children should be delivered nationally. Despite increasing demands overall on CAMHS, irrespective of the source of referrals, individual cases professionally assessed as requiring urgent access to services receive priority.

The HSE Service Plan 2017 provides for further development of the CAMHS service, including better out-of-hours liaison and seven-day response cover, against a background where the population of children is expected to increase by around 8,500 over 2016-17. Around 18,500 children will attend the HSE CAMHS service this year, including around 14,000 referrals. Detailed activity data on CAMHS is published by the Executive in its monthly Performance Reports available on the HSE website. This shows, for example, 68% of children referred are seen within twelve weeks. My objective, and that of the HSE, is to further improve all aspects of mental health care nationally for those under age 18, including those relating to age appropriate care settings.

### **Disability Services Provision**

146. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans for further investment at a training centre (details supplied); the services available there at present; the number of staff working at this facility currently; the staff that have been allocated in the past 12 months; his plans to increase staff at this facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15591/17]

**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 Action Plan**

147. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the budgetary increases the eight point plan to reform the HSE will require; the timeline over which these goals are expected to be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15603/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Oireachtas All-Party Committee on the Future of Healthcare was established in June 2016 to develop a single long term vision for healthcare over a 10 year period, with cross party support.

At a meeting with the Committee last week, I outlined my views on the future direction of the health service and a number of key priorities that I believe should underpin that future direction. I welcomed the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee and to also reiterate my belief that political consensus on the broad direction of health policy is crucial to delivering a real improvement in our health services. Considering I expect to receive the final report and recommendations of the Committee next month I intend to await the outcome before moving ahead with changes in relation to system design, financing or governance.

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

148. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider launching an in-

centive programme to recruit graduating medical students to stay in the medical system here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15604/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I recognize that the recruitment and retention of medical doctors who graduate and are trained in Ireland is important to the effective functioning of the Irish health service, and is in keeping with our obligations under the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel.

In July 2013, a Working Group, chaired by Prof Brian MacCraith, President, Dublin City University, was established to carry out a Strategic Review to examine and make high-level recommendations relating to training and career pathways for doctors with a view to:

- Improving graduate retention in the public health system;
- Planning for future service needs; and
- Realising maximum benefit from investment in medical education and training.

The Working Group completed its work in June 2014 and, in all, submitted three reports and made 25 recommendations. The reports address a range of barriers and issues relating to the recruitment and retention of doctors in the Irish public health system.

The Strategic Review recommendations are being implemented through a range of structures and processes across the health system. Each recommendation has an identified business owner and progress updates are sought by my Department on a regular basis. To support implementation of the recommendations, my Department has also established an Implementation Monitoring Group, comprising key stakeholders. To date, four progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations have been published on my Department's website. Implementation of the recommendations of the Strategic Review continues to be a priority for my Department and the Health Service Executive.

Other positive developments which will also address issues around recruitment and retention include: restoration of the Living Out Allowance for non-consultant hospital doctors appointed since 2012, which will be incorporated in to the basic salary of these doctors from 1 July 2017; the launching of a careers and training website; agreement by the HSE to double the number of family-friendly training places over a three year period, and the streamlining of processes and the elimination of paperwork burdens associated with rotations through the online National Employment Record.

### **Health Action Plan**

149. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will ensure that persons in need of medical procedures are not left behind during the process of reforming the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15607/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Oireachtas All-Party Committee on the Future of Healthcare was established in June 2016 to develop a single long term vision for healthcare over a 10 year period, with cross party support.

At a meeting with the Committee last week, I outlined my views on the future direction of the health service and a number of key priorities that I believe should underpin that future direction. I welcomed the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee and to also

reiterate my belief that political consensus on the broad direction of health policy is crucial to delivering a real improvement in our health services. Considering I expect to receive the final report and recommendations of the Committee next month I intend to await the outcome before moving ahead with changes in relation to system design, financing or governance.

I also acknowledged the importance of taking a planned approach to any reforms and improvements to ensure that the health service remains capable of delivering services. The benefit of a ten year horizon is that it provides a context for carefully planning the evolution of structures so as to avoid unduly disrupting the primary focus on improving care delivery.

I look forward to the report of the Committee which will set out a 10 year vision and plan for our health services, which is due to be finalised by the end of April 2017.

### **Medical Card Applications**

150. **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. [15613/17]

**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.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

151. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of an overseas registration application (details supplied) which is with the NMBI since August 2017. [15622/17]

152. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of an overseas registration application (details supplied) which has been with the NMBI since December 2015 [15623/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 152 together.

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 NMBI. I have referred the Deputy's question to the NMBI for attention and direct reply within 10 working days.

## General Practitioner Training

153. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to continue the GP training scheme currently operating successfully at Tralee Institute of Technology and co-ordinated by a local GP group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15627/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services. The Programme for Partnership Government commits to increasing the number of GP training places to 259 places annually. In July 2016, the GP training intake increased from 157 to 172 places and the HSE's 2017 National Service Plan envisages a further increase, to 187 places this year. I am anxious to achieve further increases in future years in order to ensure that the future manpower needs of general practice can be met.

I understand that as of July 2016, there are 8 first year GP trainees attending the South West GP Training Programme which is based in Tralee. As GP training is currently the responsibility of the HSE, I have arranged for the question on the future of this training scheme to be transferred for direct reply to the Deputy.

## Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

154. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will cover the costs of a medical device required after an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15652/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for this matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

## Ambulance Service

155. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the role of the national ambulance service in providing transport to hospital appointments for those that have no alternative transport available to them; the number of referrals to this office in 2016; the number of transfers arranged; the numbers of transfers refused; the other transport options available to persons who cannot arrange transport to and from hospital appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15653/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

## Hospital Appointments Status

156. **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. [15674/17]

**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.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

157. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by his Department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and-or streams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15681/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department administered a National Lottery Discretionary Fund for the years 2011 to 2016 from which once-off grants were paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. Total funding amounted to €3.286m per year.

A list of all the organisations that received lottery funding in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 is available on my Department's website at <http://health.gov.ie/about-us/list-of-organisations-who-received-lottery-funding-2009-2016/>

My Department no longer operates a National Lottery Fund. However, the Deputy should note that the HSE operates a similar scheme and continues to provide grants to health agencies and other organisations from National Lottery funds.

### **Hospitals Data**

158. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the number of babies who have had to stay in neonatal intensive care units in each of the past three years; the average length of stay for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15685/17]

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

### **Respite Care Services Availability**

159. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities awaiting respite beds in County Dublin, in tabular form; the number waiting six months, 12 months and more than 18 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15716/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

160. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15717/17]

**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**

161. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the outpatient waiting list for appointments to attend the service of the urology department in St. James's Hospital for six months, 12 months, 24 months, 36 months and 48 months. [15724/17]

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

### **Health Promotion**

162. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the details of a HSE campaign (details supplied); the planned duration of the campaign; the cost of the campaign for its duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15725/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** I welcome the Health Service Executive website [askaboutalcohol.ie](http://askaboutalcohol.ie) and the information campaign on alcohol as an important first step in enabling individuals to manage their own drinking. This website and the associated campaign will play an important role in providing public health information on alcohol. Simple yet effective tools like the drinks calculator will empower individuals to assess their drinking habits and make informed choices to improve their health and wellbeing. The website will also be an useful resource for health services workers and those working in the field.

The Department has asked the Health Service Executive to reply to you directly in relation to the specific questions you raise in respect of the website and campaign on alcohol.



## **Hospital Waiting Lists**

163. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15727/17]

**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.

## **Departmental Contracts Data**

164. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15739/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I can confirm no private investigation firms were hired by my Department up to the end of 2015. My officials are reviewing records for 2016 and to date in 2017 and will advise the Deputy of any further relevant information; however, to my knowledge the Department of Health does not use the services of private investigation firms.

## **Brexit Issues**

165. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to counteract the negative effects of Brexit on agricultural communities; if a county projection of impact on associated tax has been successful; if not, if this will be considered (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15608/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ever since the UK Referendum on Brexit, I and my Department have been actively engaged in assessing the impact of the vote on the Irish agri food sector, and particularly on those in rural agricultural communities. I fully recognise the potential difficulties that the sector could face in the event of a hard Brexit, a sector which is of critical importance to our economy. Its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular.

The more immediate impacts of Brexit relate to the significant drop in the value of sterling against the euro and the effects that this is having on industries with significant trading activity in the UK.

The medium- to longer-term impacts will revolve around the potential application of tariffs, the implications of divergence in regulations and standards, border controls with Great Britain

and Northern Ireland, and certification, including the related areas of veterinary and animal health certification. There will also be difficult challenges in relation to potential restricted access to fishing grounds and resources.

In response to the challenges posed, I have undertaken a number of important steps within my own Department, which include the establishment of a Brexit Response Committee and a dedicated Brexit Unit. As already mentioned, I have also created a Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which is complemented by frequent contact with representative organisations and companies on an ongoing basis.

Last October, as part of Budget 2017, I announced measures aimed at alleviating the pressures of exchange rate volatility associated with Brexit. These measures included the introduction of the 'Agri Cashflow Support Loan' fund of €150 million; enhanced taxation measures and an additional allocation of €1.6m in 2016 and €2m in 2017 to Bord Bia to ensure that they are in a position to provide Brexit-related supports to affected companies. I also provided for increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme.

I recently awarded over €1.8 million in grants to 19 seafood enterprises under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme for the seafood sector. The aim of these grants is to incentivise seafood innovation and new product development as a means of meeting the Brexit challenge.

I am also involved in a series of bilateral meetings with my EU counterparts which is aimed at building alliances to ensure that agri-food and fisheries issues are at the top of the EU negotiation agenda. I want to discuss and get a sense of the importance of Brexit for them and of the degree to which they could support Ireland's efforts to have these issues specifically and adequately taken account of in the negotiations.

I have just returned from a series of such bilaterals in Germany, Netherlands and Denmark, and most recently in Estonia and Poland. I have plans to meet other EU Ministers next month.

I am also in regular communication with Commissioner Hogan, and my officials have taken part in meetings with the Commission and the Barnier Task Force.

In all of these engagements I am making clear our demand for continued unfettered access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures, as well as keeping the UK market viable for Irish producers by minimising the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries. In relation to fisheries, Ireland wants to maintain current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal and protect our quota share for joint fish stocks.

The Government remains very focused on supporting the agri-food industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

### **Agriculture Scheme Data**

166. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of persons in County Clare who 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. [15567/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested in respect of Co. Clare is set out in the following table.

Scheme	Paid	Unpaid
GLAS 1	1,453	142
GLAS 2	646	43
AEOS	476	80

#### Agriculture Scheme Data

167. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of persons in County Waterford who 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. [15570/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested in respect of Co. Waterford is set out in the following table.

Scheme	Paid	Unpaid
GLAS 1	289	71
GLAS 2	106	25
AEOS	82	12

#### GLAS Payments

168. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15590/17]

**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.

#### TAMS Payments

169. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received a TAMS application; and if he will review it without delay. [15616/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a claim for payment for investments under the Dairy Equipment Scheme on the 20 March 2017. The payment claim is currently being examined with a view to finalising shortly.

#### Fishing Industry Development

170. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will approve the natura fishing plan for Castlemaine Harbour 2016-2026 in view of the fact studies by the Marine Institute and BIM are complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15625/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I approved the new Fisheries Natura Plan for mussel seed fishing in Castlemaine Harbour, Co. Kerry, on 13 March 2017 following appropriate assessment which determined that the fishing activities described in the Plan will not affect the integrity of the features of the designated Natura 2000 sites.

The Plan was prepared by the Bottom Grown Mussel Consultative Forum's Secretariat (provided by Bord Iascaigh Mhara) on behalf of the Castlemaine Harbour Co-operative Society Limited (persons affected by the designation) in consultation with the Society's Committee of Management, BIM and local mussel operators. As part of the appropriate assessment process, the Marine Institute prepared an assessment report and both documents were issued for consultation. In making my determination, I took account of advice received from the Marine Institute, views received during the consultation, relevant legislation, as well as the matters concerning the management of the mussel seed fishery resource.

The process governing the assessment and consideration of the Fisheries Natura Plan is set out in the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Sea-fisheries) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 290 of 2013). The Plan and associated documents are being made available on the website [www.fishingnet.ie](http://www.fishingnet.ie), the Government's commercial sea-fishing network portal.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

171. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in an AEOS 2 payment in respect of a person (details supplied); if he will expedite payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15628/17]

**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. 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. These checks have now been completed and it is expected that the appropriate payment will issue within the next 10 working days.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

172. **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. [15669/17]

**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. 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. Officials are working through these files and payments will be made as soon as possible.

### **Control of Dogs**

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) with regard to microchipping dogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15675/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The key concern underpinning microchipping arrangements is to ensure that dogs are identified and can be quickly reunited with their owners if they become lost. A dog microchip has limited functionality due its small size and, since it contains no internal power source, it cannot, on its own, lead to the reunification of a stray dog with its owner unless the 15 digit number is recorded on a database that can be easily located. Likewise, the owner of a dog involved in killing sheep cannot be traced unless a robust microchipping system is in place. A number of databases are operational in Ireland and I am satisfied that there is adequate competition in the market place in Ireland. However, my Department is currently reviewing the legislation relating to dog microchipping.

### **GLAS Payments**

174. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1067 of 21 March 2017, when a GLAS payment in respect of persons (details supplied) will be paid in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15679/17]

**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 and payment of 85% of the payment due for 2016 has issued. The balancing payment of 15% of 2016 entitlement will issue in due course.

### **GLAS Payments**

175. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15711/17]

**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 the first instalment payment in respect of 2015 has issued.

During the 2015 prepayment checking on the balancing 2015 payment 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 payment as

soon as possible.

### **GLAS Payments**

176. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15726/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first instalment of 85% of the payment due for 2016 has issued to the person named and the balancing 15% will issue in due course.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

177. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15730/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There have been no private investigation firms hired by this Department in the last five years.

### **Inland Fisheries Regulation**

178. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to reopen the rivers Nore and Suir for snapnet fishing for this season (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15582/17]

**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 the independent Standing Scientific Committee on Salmon (SSC), comprising scientists from a range of organisations. Scientific and management assessments of each stock, including the Suir and the Nore, are carried out every year with IFI engaged in an extensive stock monitoring which feeds into the scientific committee's annual reviews.

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.

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. The scientific committee applies a range of rod exploitation rates for recreational fishing activity and adds the commercial catch to calculate the total run of salmon.

For the 2017 season, based on rod catch and exploitation rates, the Suir was estimated to be meeting 79% of its conservation limit (CL) and the Nore achieving 70% of the CL. Management advice is that as both rivers are meeting greater than 65% of the CL they can be open for catch and release angling but this is not sufficient for harvest fisheries either commercial (including snap net) or angling.

The percentage of the CL achieved on the Nore and Suir for the last 5 years is shown in the following table.

-	% CL achieved	% CL achieved	% CL achieved	% CL achieved	% CL achieved
River	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Nore	70	60	91	121	153
Suir, Clo-diagh, Linnagaun, Blackwater	79	68	80	83	117

The salmon assessment methodologies used in Ireland are considered internationally as best practice. Many other countries are moving towards the development of similar scientific assessment models for salmon stock conservation.

### Electricity Transmission Network

179. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider investing in infrastructure to prevent future power outages following snow events; his views on whether such an investment might actually yield future cost savings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15605/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** EirGrid, as the transmission system operator and ESB Networks, as the distribution system operator are continually working on ways to improve the electricity system for the benefit of the people of Ireland. As set out in the 'Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure' the State owned Networks Companies are mandated to deliver the State's network investment programmes in the most cost efficient and timely way possible in the interests of all energy consumers who need the investment and who also pay for it. Decisions on works to undertake are a matter for EirGrid and ESB Networks, but I am advised that in 2016, ESB Networks invested over €370m in reinforcement and construction of new networks.

### Postal Codes

180. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if insurance companies are permitted to use eircodes in assessing the eligibility of a person for insurance purposes and in particular flood insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15630/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Capita Business Support Services trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement and maintain the national Postcode System “Eircode”.

Some of the industries using Eircode data in their business include retail, logistics/delivery, utilities, public sector bodies, financial services and insurance. Eircode licensed End Users to use the Eircode data to improve the quality of the services they offer including address verification and deliveries, as well as for risk assessment purposes. This could include risk assessment practices in the insurance industry.

### **Post Office Network**

181. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider exploring the option of giving the post office service responsibility for the compilation of the electoral register and enumeration of census data to make the service more viable in view of the urgent crisis in the delivery of postal services; if he will include this in the list of extra tasks being considered for the post office network on foot of the report of the post office hub working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15634/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The operation of the post office network is a day to day operational matter for the Board and management of An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have a statutory function.

On foot of the reconfiguration of Government Departments last year, responsibility for the post office network transferred to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

### **Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme**

182. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a feed-in tariff for electricity generated via solar photo voltaic systems will be introduced. [15635/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy in Ireland. This builds on the 2015 Energy White Paper and recognises that solar has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland’s energy future.

My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. Analysis is on-going on a range of technologies to be included. This analysis includes an assessment of the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics - both rooftop and ground-mounted.

The new scheme design requires detailed economic analysis, currently underway, on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting several renewable technologies at various scales. Once this analysis is complete, my Department will publish a second public consultation on the design of the new support scheme. Details will be advertised on my Department’s website at [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie). There will be several decisions to be made on this scheme with regard to



scale, technologies and, in particular, how communities will have a greater involvement than in previous schemes.

Before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission. Subject to this, it is expected that the new scheme will become operational in the first half of 2018.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

183. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15733/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** No private investigation firms have been hired by my Department in the past five years or to date in 2017.

### **Driver Test Centres**

184. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of operating driver test centres nationwide under the headings of the rent paid for each location and the metre squared of each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15620/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

*The referred reply under Standing Order 42A was forwarded to the Deputy.*

### **Transport Infrastructure Provision**

185. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of meetings of the dedicated project steering group for metro north to date; the details of the membership of the steering group; the details of each stage of the work to be undertaken by the steering group; the timeframe for the completion of each stage of this work programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15543/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the new Metro North project.

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.

*The referred reply under Standing Order 42A was forwarded to the Deputy.*

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

186. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a company (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; the number of the 2,320 applications it is envisaged will be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15576/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme.

All of the 2320 applications received under the Programme will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. An announcement regarding allocations will be made later this year.

It is not possible to estimate how many allocations will be made in advance of completion of the assessment process.

### **Road Projects**

187. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade the N24 road between counties Waterford and Limerick; if he has given consideration to bypassing towns on this route such as Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel, Tipperary town, Mooncoin, Piltown and Limerick Junction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15583/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N24) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

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

*The referred reply under Standing Order 42A was forwarded to the Deputy.*

### **Swimming Pool Programme**

188. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a project (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15584/17]

**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. It should be noted that the maximum possible grant available under the LASPP is €3.8 million. There are four stages in the development of a project under the programme, namely Preliminary Report, Contract Documents, Tender and Construction.

Edenderry is in the 2000 round of the LASPP for a refurbishment/replacement pool. Offaly County Council and representatives of the local Pool Committee which runs the pool met with officials from my Department in May 2016. At the meeting it was agreed that the Committee would look at revised plans to scale down the non-essential costs and revert to the Department with those plans. The County Council and Committee were reminded that they also need to submit a more robust feasibility study. Revised plans were received by my Department last week and are currently being examined.

In relation to the future funding of swimming pools, my Department is currently undertaking a review of national sports policy which includes a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities including swimming pools in the years ahead.

### **Greenways Funding**

189. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will allocate funding to Kerry County Council to allow it to proceed with the Tralee to Fenit greenway now that all land ownership issues have been resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15602/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Kerry Council Council submitted an application to my Department for the construction of Phase 1 of the Tralee-Fenit Greenway under the 2014-2016 National Cycle Network funding programme. While no funding was awarded under that programme, €345,000 was subsequently awarded from the Government Stimulus package 2014 for infrastructural development which allowed Kerry County Council to commence Phase 1, the Rock Street to Casement Station section of the Greenway.

My Department is aware of the further works required to complete this greenway as is the case in many other Greenway projects around the country. However, it is not intended to issue a further funding call in the immediate future. As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Partnership Government commits to making additional funding available for greenways and I am pursuing this funding in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

In addition, my Department is developing a new Strategy to underpin investment in Greenways and I expect that the Department will go out to public consultation in the near future seeking views on relevant issues to inform the development of the Strategy. When the capital plan review is finalised and there is clarity on the totality of the funding that will be available for greenways in the coming years, my Department will issue further funding calls and local authorities would then be able to submit projects for funding.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15617/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick**

**O'Donovan):** I can confirm that the application referred to by the Deputy was submitted under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme.

All of the 2,320 applications received under the Programme will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months.

An announcement regarding allocations will be made later this year.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

191. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application under the sports capital programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15639/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme.

All of the 2320 applications received will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months.

An announcement regarding allocations will be made later this year.

### **Public Private Partnerships Expenditure**

192. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost incurred from the Vote of his Department to meet payments to PPP companies in respect of performance clauses contained in PPPs, with particular reference to the Limerick tunnel and the M4 toll schemes. [15643/17]

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

More specifically, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws, to enter into toll agreements and for the operation of concessions with private investors in respect of national roads such as the Limerick Tunnel and the M4 scheme is vested in TII under the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

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

*The referred reply under Standing Order 42A was forwarded to the Deputy.*

### **Driver Test Data**

193. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of tests carried out at each location in 2016 with regard to each operating driver test location nationwide; the success and failure rates at each location in 2016; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [15657/17]

**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.

I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply.

*The referred reply under Standing Order 42A was forwarded to the Deputy.*

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days

### Departmental Funding

194. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by his department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and or streams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15693/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Voluntary and community organisations can apply for funding from my Department under the Sports Capital Programme. Details of the scheme and the organisations that have received funding over the years in question are available on the Department’s website - *www.dttas.ie*.

My Department also provides grants to some organisations such as the Community Rescue Boats, Irish Cave Rescue and Mountain Rescue Ireland which includes various regional mountain rescue teams, all of which are run on a voluntary basis.

### Road Projects

195. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans and the timeframe for planning and delivery of a western Dublin orbital route link between the N4 and N7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15713/17]

196. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans and the timeframe for planning and delivery of the Fonthill Road junction improvement works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15714/17]

197. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans and timeframe for planning and delivery of a Rathcoole bypass in Dublin mid-west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15715/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority’s own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable. 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.

Provision was made in the Capital Plan for the upgrade of roads in the vicinity of Grange

Castle Business Park and the Department is providing grant assistance for that strategic scheme at present.

As regards the possible measures identified in the TII/South County Dublin County Council N4/N7 Corridor Study, the further assessment of options is a matter for the local authority.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15745/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Details of payments made to external service providers are always available on my Department's website at the following link: Expenditure on External Services. In the case of private investigation firms my Department has not hired any.

### **Job Losses**

199. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she will take regarding the announced 220 job losses in a bank (details supplied); if she will meet the bank and the Financial Services Union regarding this threat to employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15649/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** My Department remains focused on creating the most competitive environment for enterprise to succeed so that we can achieve our goal of sustainable employment for all. Working with our enterprise agencies and with colleagues across Government, we are committed to delivering a range of actions outlined in our National and Regional Action Plans for Jobs to ensure that quality and sustainable jobs continue to be created throughout all regions of the country.

Ireland has a robust suite of employment rights legislation, which offers extensive protections to employees. Those protections include the Protection of Employment Acts 1977-2007, which provide for a process of information and consultation between the employer and the employee representatives in circumstances where a collective redundancy is proposed, the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts 1973 to 2005, which give employees entitlements to specified notice periods or payment in lieu of such notice and the Payment of Wages Act 1991 which protects outstanding wages, holiday pay, commission and bonuses. In addition, the Redundancy Payments Acts, which are administered by the Minister for Social Protection, provide for minimum statutory redundancy payments.

The Protection of Employment Act 1977 provides that, where employers are planning collective redundancies, they are obliged to supply the employees' representatives with specific information regarding the proposed redundancies and to consult with those representatives at least 30 days before the first dismissal takes place, to see if the redundancies can be avoided or lessened or their effects mitigated.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights legislation. The WRC's Customer Service Section provides information in relation to employment, equality and industrial relations rights and obligations, and how to

obtain redress where appropriate. WRC information officials are available to meet staff, either individually or collectively, to discuss their employment rights, including matters related to redundancy. The WRC's Customer Service Section can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90. The website <http://www.workplacelrelations.ie> also provides extensive information on employment rights.

### Employment Rights

200. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the Workplace Relations Commission in preparing a code of practice under section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 to set out best industrial relations practice in managing the engagement between employers and employees in the run up to retirement, including requests to work beyond the normal retirement age in the employment concerned; the way and with whom the commission has consulted in preparing this code of practice; if a deadline has been set by when she expects the commission to complete its work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15718/17]

**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.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990, I have requested the WRC to prepare a Code of Practice around the issue of longer working lives. The Code of Practice is to set out best industrial relations practice in managing the engagement between employers and employees in the run up to retirement, including requests to work beyond what would be considered the normal retirement age in the employment concerned. As is standard practice for this process, the WRC is consulting with relevant stakeholders for their views, including employer representatives, Trade Unions and Public Sector. It is anticipated that a draft Code will be submitted to me shortly.

### Departmental Contracts Data

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of private investigation firms hired by her Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied her Department with a report on completion of their work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15740/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Payments to private investigation firms hired by my Department in each of the last five years and in 2017 to date are set out in the following tables.

#### 2017

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
Nil		

#### 2016

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
J + A Davis	€795.66	No
Brosnan Investigations Ltd.	€238.12	No
Resolve Ireland	€13,143.16	Yes

**2015**

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
Kellkee Services	€382.02	No

**2014**

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
S & R Investigations Services Ltd.	€90	No
Kellkee Services	€1,095.02	No

**2013**

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
Kellkee Services	€1,204.92	No
J + A Davis	€650.72	No
ABC Investigations Ltd	€184.50	No

**2012**

Private Investigation Firm	Amount Paid	Report Received (Yes/No)
J + A Davis	€242.81	No
Kellkee Services	€2,273.60	No

**Child Care Services Funding**

202. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the grants that are available to private or community crèches to allow them improve their facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15566/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On 20th March 2017 I announced that funding will be made available under the Early Years Capital programme for 2017 in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: Additional 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 are responsible for administering the programme on behalf of my Department. Further details and information on how to make an application for funding are available on the Pobal website [www.pobal.ie](http://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 Guidelines**

203. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 21 March 2017, the regulations and guidelines in place through her Department for teenage international students arriving here who live with a host family and attend secondary schools for an academic term or complete school year, without the presence of their parents or legal guardians within the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15581/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The issues raised by the Deputy relate primarily to matters (Garda vetting and schools) which come within the remit of the Departments of Justice and Equality and Education and Skills respectively. The welfare and protection of children and, in particular, vulnerable children, is everybody's concern. Responsibility for children's welfare arises in all settings where children are, and attaches to all responsible adults who come in contact with children.

Underpinning the welfare and protection of children is the Child Care Act 1991, Children First: *National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* {2011}, the Children First Act 2015 and, of course, our Constitution.

The Children First Guidance relates to recognising and reporting child welfare and protection concerns, and applies to the cohort of young people referred to by the Deputy, in the same way that it applies to all children and young people.

### **Family Resource Centres**

204. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the precise level of funding to be allocated to the family resource centre programme in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15629/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has advised that the current 2017 allocation to the Family Resource Centre Programme is €13.512 million.

In 2016, Tusla provided financial support to some 109 communities nationwide under this Programme. This will continue in 2017.

Tusla plans to build on the strengths of the Family Resource Centre Programme in the years ahead to deliver its mandate for community-based early intervention and family support.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

205. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount allocated to voluntary and community organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by her Department, including a breakdown of all funding schemes and-or streams; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15683/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The information requested is not readily available in my Department and is currently being collated. The information sought will be forwarded directly to the Deputy when available.

*The following deferred reply was received under Standing Order 42A*

My Department provides funding directly to a wide range of community, voluntary and other organisations that are engaged in the provision of specific services to children and young people through a range of targeted programmes. Details of the individual programmes and the funding allocations are set out in the table.

Year	Childcare Pro-grammes	Youth Organisa-tions and Services	National Lottery	ABC Ini-tiative	Interven-tion Pro-gramme for Chil-dren and Young People	Children & Young People’s Policy Frame-work and Other Pro-grammes
2011	€250m	€47m	€0.5m	€4m	N/A	€4m
2012	€251m	€57m	€0.5m	€2m	N/A	€3m
2013	€258m	€52m	€0.5m	€3m	N/A	€2m
2014	€260m	€50m	€0.9m	€4m	N/A	€4m
2015	€257m	€50m	N/A	€5m	€0.9m	€3m
2016	€337m	€52m	N/A	€4m	€5m	€5m
2017	€458m	€57m	N/A	€6m	€5m	€4m

Particulars relating to each funding programme are as follows:

#### Childcare Programmes

The most significant share of the funding, is targeted at implementing three major childcare programmes that include the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, and the Community Education and Training (CETS) programme and more recently the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme.

#### Youth Organisations and Services

Funding 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. The following organisations, services and projects are supported through grant funding-

- Youth Service Grant Scheme
- Special Projects for Youth
- Young Peoples Facilities and Services Funds Rounds 1 and 2

- Youth Information Centres
- Local Youth Club Grant Scheme
- Local Drug Task Force Projects
- Gaisce – the President’s Award Scheme
- Léargas – the Exchange Bureau
- National Youth Health
- National Youth Arts Programme
- National Lottery Funding Scheme

Grants were also made available to groups and organisations involved in the provision of services to children and young people from the application based National Lottery Funding Scheme which operated over the years 2011-2014.

#### Area Based Childhood Programme

The Area Based Programme (ABC) is co-funded by the Department and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) for the period 2013-2017 and it continues the work of the earlier Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) which piloted a range of programmes in areas such as literacy, speech and language, parenting, health and pro-social behaviour, in 3 sites (Tallaght, Ballymun and Darndale). The aim of the ABC programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families in 13 areas of disadvantage.

#### Intervention Programme for Children and Young People

This programme provides Dormant Accounts funds to support measures intended to support children and disadvantaged young people.

#### Children & Young People’s Policy Framework and Other Programmes

This funding stream supports a range of programmes and activities that include the following:

- Children and Young People’s Services Committees
- Children and Young People’s Policy Framework – implementation
- Voice of the Child and Children’s Participation
- Play and Recreation National Days
- Child Protection Rapporteur
- Missing Children’s Hotline
- Childcare Law Reporting Project
- Young Social Innovators
- Children First Guidance
- North South Cooperation

## Departmental Contracts Data

206. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of private investigation firms hired by her Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied her Department with a report on completion of their work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15732/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department was formally established on 2nd June 2011; no private investigation firms have been hired in the past five years and to date in 2017.

## Air Corps Equipment

207. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the type of aircraft which the Defence Forces plan to purchase in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15551/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces, including the Air Corps, is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable them to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

Future equipment priorities for the Air Corps are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process.

The White Paper provides for the replacement of the Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The aircraft specification is currently being prepared and it is expected that the tender competition will be initiated and advertised on the e-tenders website in the near future.

A decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft which was written off following a fatal crash in 2009. The replacement PC-9M aircraft, scheduled for delivery this year from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland at a cost of €5 million plus VAT, will bring the fleet up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

The White Paper also provides for the replacement of the two CASA 235s Maritime Patrol Aircraft by 2019, with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft. This would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

## Defence Forces Fatalities

208. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason for the delay in publishing the report of Judge Roderick Murphy, ordered by his office in December 2014, into the death of a person (details supplied) and the disappearance of a person (details supplied) in the Lebanon on 27 April 1981 whilst serving with UNIFIL. [15626/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In December 2014, the then Minister for Defence, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., appointed former High Court

Judge, Mr. Roderick Murphy to conduct an independent review of the investigation of the death of Private Hugh Doherty and the disappearance of Private Kevin Joyce (Caoimhín Seoighe) on 27 April 1981 while serving as members of the Irish Battalion with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Privates Doherty and Joyce were serving with UNIFIL in 1981 when, on 27 April 1981, an observation post at Dayr Ntar manned by them came under attack. Private Doherty was later found dead from gunshot wounds and Private Joyce was missing. The attackers are unknown. Over the years, extensive diplomatic and military efforts to locate Private Joyce have proved fruitless. To date, no information has been elicited to lead to the recovery of Private Joyce's remains.

In late June 2015, Mr. Roderick Murphy presented his draft report to the Minister for Defence. Following a review of his report a number of clarifications were raised with Mr. Murphy which were addressed. The Department of Defence also sought and received legal advice from the Attorney General in relation to the publication of the report.

In March 2016, a copy of the draft report was forwarded on a confidential basis to the families and persons identified by the Reviewer for comment prior to publication of the report. The Reviewer received comments from families and a number of persons identified. He has considered these comments and has amended the draft Report where he has considered it appropriate to do so. As a result of this exercise further legal advice was sought from the Attorney General. This advice has been received and is under consideration. It is intended to publish the report once all issues have been finalised.

### **Military Medals**

209. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason a person (details supplied) has not been issued services medals due. [15678/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Information from military records shows that the individual in question was issued a Service medal in September 1993. If it is a case that for some reason this ex-member of the Defence Forces did not receive his medal at that time, then contact should be made with the Regulations Staff Officer in "A" Administration, Defence Forces Headquarters, Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

### **Defence Forces Personnel Data**

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of promotional positions waiting to be filled throughout the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15700/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 31 January 2017 was 9,136, comprising 7,346 Army, 705 Air Corps and 1,085 Naval Service, whole time equivalent personnel.

The following table outlines the establishment, strength and vacancies of the Permanent Defence Force, by Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as at 31 January 2017, based on the agreed stabilised strength for the Permanent Defence Force of 9,500.

Promotions are ongoing within the Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies. A new NCO

promotion competition, to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above, has been launched. Promotions from the Order of Merit Lists from this competition will commence in Q3 2017. Promotions at Corporal rank take place at formation/service level when vacancies arise within Units and where there are qualified personnel in these Units to fill the appointments.

In addition, targeted recruitment will continue in 2017 so as to maintain the serving strength at or close to 9,500 personnel. It is my intention that promotions, along with targeted recruitment, will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

	Lt Gen	Maj Gen	Brig Gen	Col	Lt Col	Comdt	Capt	Lt	SM	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte/Cadet
Army Rank Establishment	1	2	6	34	110	257	306	167	29	32	115	169	973	1,438	3,880
Army Strength	1	2	6	31	103	255	261	165	29	31	92	155	843	1,350	4,022 *
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	3	7	2	45	2	0	1	23	14	130	88	-1 42
Air Corps Rank Establishment	0	0	1	3	14	36	65	48	8	4	56	14	131	183	324
Air Corps Strength	0	0	1	3	12	33	48	22	7	3	55	11	111	152	247 **
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	2	3	17	26	1	1	1	3	2 0	31	77
Naval Service Rank Establishment	0	0	1	2	13	45	81	41	6	7	75	15	226	180	402
Naval Service Strength	0	0	1	2	13	51	49	34	6	7	68	13	173	130	538 * **
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	0	-6	32	7	0	0	7	2	53	50	-136
Total Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	3	9	-1	94	35	1	2	31	1 9	203	169	-201

\*Includes 80 Army Cadets

\*\*Includes 28 Air Corps Cadets

\*\*\*Includes 23 Naval Service Cadets.

There are an additional 76 personnel on career breaks/secondment, who are not included in the strengths in the above table.

**Note: Equivalent Naval Service Ranks**

Brigadier General/Commodore

Colonel/Captain

Lieutenant Colonel/Commander

Commandant/Lieutenant Commander

Captain/Lieutenant(NS)

Lieutenant/Sub Lieutenant

Sergeant Major/Warrant Officer

Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Chief Petty Officer

Company Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Petty Officer

Company Sergeant/Chief Petty Officer

Sergeant/Petty Officer

Corporal/Leading Seaman

Private/Able Seaman.

### **Emergency Planning**

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which discussions continue to take place at EU level with a view to assuring a high degree of preparedness in the event of a terrorist attack; if the Defence Forces continue to be adequately briefed in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15701/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Primary responsibility for security matters and the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. There is significant engagement on an ongoing basis with respect to international terrorism with other countries in the EU.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

There is ongoing and close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including ATCP deployments and a wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies. Regular coordination and liaison meetings also take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress to date in respect of proposed recruitment to the Defence Forces; the way in which each branch of the Defence Forces is likely to benefit from the recruitment programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15702/17]

**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, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, 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 the Defence Forces are planning to induct 860 new entrants across all services and competition streams in 2017.

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 were launched on 22 March 2017. Cadetships will be available in the following streams in 2017: Army (Line, Equitation School & Engineer Corps), Naval Service (Operations Branch, Marine Engineer Branch and Electrical Engineering Branch) and Air Corps (Pilots).

Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. A recruitment campaign for the appointment of Direct Entry Naval Service Officers, in the Operations Branch, Marine Engineer Branch and Electrical Engineer Branch of the Naval Service, is currently on-going.

It is my intention that targeted recruitment, will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

### **Defence Forces Training**

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which Army, Naval Service and Air Corps training continues to be in line with modern and international best practice; if particular procedures are shown to be in need of updating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15703/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to enable it to fulfil the roles laid down by Government.

The Defence Forces conduct training and education under four broad categories namely; leadership, skills, career and collective training. Leadership training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensures that personnel are prepared for exercising command authority across the full range of military functions both at home and overseas in international operations. Skills training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensures that its personnel have the requisite individual, specialist, and crew skills. Career training and education provides the organisation with the necessary pool of leaders and commanders at all levels. Collective Training allows military personnel to use their individual, crew, specialist and career training together, to develop integrated and coherent combat forces.



The scheduling of training in the Defence Forces is underpinned by an analysis of training needed to meet operational output requirements and capability development needs. A long term strategy is adopted with current planning horizons out to 2021.

The Defence Forces seek to constantly benchmark training across all three arms against best military and academic practice. Military best practice is ensured by implementing a policy of standardisation that is in line with EU and NATO/Partnership for Peace partners. Academic best practice is ensured by benchmarking courses through accreditation under the National Framework of Qualifications which is validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. The Defence Forces deliver military programmes and modules meeting national and international standards. The Defence Forces also engage with external educational institutions in order to facilitate organisational learning. This engagement with national and international educational institutions, military and civilian, aims to ensure that the Defence Forces retain currency with regards to best international practice.

### **Air Corps Operations**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Air Corps is adequately equipped to detect and-or intercept any activity posing a threat to national security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15704/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Air Corps is not tasked or equipped to monitor aircraft overflying the entirety of Irish airspace. However, on a routine basis the Air Corps monitors and communicates with foreign military aircraft where such aircraft are flying in the airspace in the vicinity of Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, where air traffic control is provided by the Defence Forces.

The Government's White Paper on Defence (2015) provides for periodic updates to consider progress with implementation and any revisions required. As stated in the White Paper, should additional funding beyond that required to maintain existing Air Corps' capabilities become available, the development of a radar surveillance capability is a priority for the Air Corps. Funding for this is not provided in the current resource envelope and any future decisions in this regard will be in the context of the ongoing security environment and any associated developments.

The Air Corps' existing Pilatus PC9 aircraft provide a very limited air to air and air to ground capacity. Whilst the development of a more capable air combat intercept capability will be considered as part of the White Paper update, at this stage there are no plans in this regard. However, these matters are kept under constant review.

### **Defence Forces Training**

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which specialist skills in dealing with security threats remain available to the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15705/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Providing for the military defence of the State's territory is a fundamental security requirement and responsibility for this is vested specifically in the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces. The defence contribution to security also encompasses defence inputs to domestic security (Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP)) in support of An Garda Síochána, who have primary responsibility for

the maintenance of law and order including the protection of the internal security of the State.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces, including the availability of specialised equipment and trained personnel, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles both at home and overseas.

A wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies and the Defence Forces hold regular coordination and liaison meetings with An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment, commensurate with operational requirements, is available for deployment in response to security threats. In this regard, the Defence Forces hold a wide range of engineering, transport plant and equipment for military purposes along with niche capabilities.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces are fully equipped and trained in line with best international practice to fulfil all roles that are assigned to them by Government. This includes the provision of relevant assistance as required in the event of a security threat.

### **Defence Forces Equipment**

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which Army, Naval Service and Air Corps vehicles, vessels or aircraft are upgraded on an annual basis; the extent of such upgrading in the past five years and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15706/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government as set out on the White Paper on Defence. Equipment priorities for the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process.

In this context the White Paper provides that the Army will continue to retain all-arms conventional military capabilities. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

There is focus on the essential force protection provided by armoured vehicles, and in this regard a maintenance and upgrade programme has commenced for the current fleet of 80 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) which will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030. A small number of armoured logistical and utility vehicles are also being procured for force protection.

The White Paper underpins the ongoing replacement of the Naval Service fleet. A significant investment over recent years has been on the procurement of new Off-Shore Patrol Vessels for the Naval Service. The third ship in the programme, LÉ William Butler Yeats, was commissioned in to service in October 2016. A contract for an additional sister ship was placed with Babcock International in June 2016 at a cost of €54.3 million, bringing investment in the new ships programme to over €250 million since 2010. The fourth ship is scheduled for delivery in mid 2018.

Future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capability requirements.

The White Paper provides that the Air Corps will see the Cessna fleet replaced with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The aircraft specification is currently being prepared, and it is expected that the tender competition will be initiated and advertised on the e-tenders website in the near future. The White Paper also provides for the replacement of two CASA 235s Maritime Patrol Aircraft by 2019, with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft. This would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

A decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft which was written off following a fatal crash in 2009. The replacement PC-9M aircraft, scheduled for delivery this year from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland at a cost of €5 million plus VAT, will bring the fleet up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

I am satisfied that the current provisions, together with the courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces is suitably equipped, in line with international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

### **Overseas Missions**

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he has had discussions at EU and UN level with regard to future deployment of the Defence Forces overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15707/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 1 March 2017, Ireland is contributing 585 Defence Forces personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National Representations.

The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 378 personnel and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 136 personnel.

The 378 personnel in UNIFIL serve alongside Finnish Armed Forces as part of a joint Battalion of which Ireland took over command in November 2016. As a consequence of taking over command we deployed an additional Company of some 150 personnel as part of Ireland's contribution to this mission.

Ireland has a long and continuous record of contributing to peacekeeping missions. Participation in these missions demonstrates Ireland's strong support for the role of the United Nations in international peacekeeping. The current contribution of some 585 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in this area.

The main EU-led mission in which Irish personnel have been serving since March 2013 is the EU-led Training Mission in Mali, EUTM Mali. The objective of the mission is to improve the capacity of the Malian Armed Forces to maintain security in Mali and restore the authority of the Malian Government and the territorial integrity of the Malian State. Currently, eighteen (18) members of the Permanent Defence Force are deployed to the mission. Following Government approval, two further Irish personnel will be deployed as trainers to the mission in the near future in response to a recent request from the Mission Commander.

During each EU Presidency both formal and informal meetings of Defence Ministers are held. On 6 March 2017, I attended the extraordinary formal Defence Ministers Meeting under the auspices of the Foreign Affairs Council. Discussions were focused on current EU-led operations and future proposed developments.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The question of a further deployment of Naval vessels to the Mediterranean is currently under consideration.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are shown in the following table.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas as of 1 March 2017

### 1. UN MISSIONS

**(i) UNIFIL** (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQ - 30

UNIFIL 109th Infantry Battalion - 340

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

**(ii) UNTSO** (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel & Syria - 12

**(iii) MINURSO** (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) - 3

**(iv) MONUSCO** (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) - 4

**(v) UNDOF** (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) HQ - 1

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 54th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) - 130

**TOTAL - 533**

### UN MANDATED MISSIONS

**(vi) EUFOR** (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 6

**(vii) EUTM Mali** (EU-Led Training Mission) - 18

**(viii) KFOR** (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ - 12

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 569**

### 2. ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

(i) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina - 1

(ii) Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 2**

### 3. EU MILITARY STAFF

Brussels - 4

**4. MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF**

(i) Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York - 1

(ii) Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna - 1

(iii) Military Representative to EU (Brussels) - 4

(iv) Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels) - 2

(v) EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium - 1

(vi) Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Division, Mons, Belgium - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS  
- 585**

**Defence Forces Personnel Data**

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel at all ranks, male and female, who have retired from the Defence Forces in each of the past four years and to date in 2017; the extent to which this has affected the overall strength of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15708/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The manpower requirements of the Permanent Defence Force are monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. Personnel are posted on the basis of operational needs across the organisation both at home and abroad. As there is a significant turnover of personnel in the Defence Forces, targeted recruitment takes places on a regular basis so as to maintain personnel numbers at or near the agreed strength levels. Cadetship and General Service recruitment competitions have recently been launched and I am advised by the military authorities that the planned target is to induct 850 - 900 new entrants to the Defence Forces across all services and competition streams in 2017.

As of 28 February 2017 the whole time equivalent strength of the Permanent Defence Force was 9,070. The following table shows the number of retirements of all male and female personnel from the start of 2013 up until the end of February 2017. The total number of Defence Forces personnel who retired in the period requested was 2,225. In terms of overall strengths the Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the PDF 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.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 *	TOTAL
ARMY						
Officers (Male)	37	50	48	59	8	202
Officers (Female)	4	5	9	3	0	21

29 March 2017

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 *	TOTAL
Other Ranks (Male)	289	299	360	437	66	1451
Other Ranks (Female)	19	17	15	14	3	68
	349	371	432	513	77	1742
AIR CORPS						
Officers (Male)	10	13	8	12	0	43
Officers (Female)	0	0	1	1	0	2
Other Ranks (Male)	21	30	44	35	8	138
Other Ranks (Female)	0	0	4	1	0	5
	31	43	57	49	8	188
NAVAL SERVICE						
Officers (Male)	7	14	7	4	0	32
Officers (Female)	1	0	2	1	0	4
Other Ranks (Male)	54	40	56	85	14	249
Other Ranks (Female)	3	1	2	3	1	10
	65	55	67	93	15	295
	445	469	556	655	100	2225

### Defence Forces Personnel Data

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the total number of women in each of the Defence Forces, at all ranks, in each of the past five years and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15709/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table sets out the number of 'Whole-time equivalent' female personnel in each of the three elements of the Permanent Defence Force as of year end for the period 2012 – 2016 and as regards

this year, until 28 February 2017, the latest date for which figures are available.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Army	485	470	464	458	476	477
Air Corps	30	35	35	33	33	33
Naval Service	68	64	64	61	59	60

The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. The Defence Forces have no restrictions with regard to the assignment of men or women to the full range of operational and administrative duties, and all promotions and career courses are open to both sexes on merit.

One impediment in achieving greater numbers of women serving in the Defence Forces is the lack of women recruitment applicants relative to men which may be as a result of societal perception and attitudes to female soldiers and officers.

In recent times there have been a number of initiatives to encourage greater female participation, such as:

- The introduction of best practices in recruitment, such as the adjustment of physical standards for female applicants,
- Special consideration is paid to women as a target group for recruitment,
- A balanced composition between men and women on recruitment and selection boards,
- All promotions and career courses are open to both sexes on merit,
- A Gender Advisor has been appointed to promote gender equality policies and training within the Defence Forces.

Over the lifetime of the White Paper 2015 it is planned to develop further initiatives to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces and to increase female participation at all ranks.

### Departmental Contracts Data

220. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of private investigation firms hired by his Department in the past five years and to date in 2017; the names of the firms; the amount they were paid; if they supplied his Department with a report on completion of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15734/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department has not hired any private investigation firms in the past 5 years.