

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 15, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 16 to 28, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 29 to 34, inclusive, answered orally.

Disadvantaged Status

35. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kildare which is fighting to retain supports, including a home school liaison staff member; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16703/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the school in question is not a DEIS school but was established on 1st September 2011 following the amalgamation of three local post primary schools in the area, two of which were DEIS schools.

Where amalgamations take place, comprising DEIS and Non-DEIS schools, DEIS status is not transferred to the newly amalgamated school. Notwithstanding this fact, my Department has continued to provide some additional non-teaching resources, including the services of a Home School Community Liaison Coordinator, in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS schools. These resources are provided by way of continued support for the targeted cohort of pupils as a transitional measure until the pupils in question have completed their post primary education. In the case of a post-primary school, these supports are provided for six years.

Given that the cohort of pupils from the former DEIS schools will have completed their second level education at the end of the current school year, the additional DEIS related resources from which this school has benefitted, will cease with effect from the end of the current school year.

This procedure has been notified to the school and outlined in a response to representations made on behalf of the school. I also met recently with representatives of the school and their public representatives and where they outlined their perspective and concerns. I have asked my officials to examine the issues raised.

It is important to note that the situation in relation to the school in question is entirely unrelated to the actions contained in the DEIS Plan 2017. This procedure in relation to amalgamations between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has been applied uniformly since the inception of

DEIS.

Questions Nos. 36 to 41, inclusive, answered orally.

National Drugs Strategy

42. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's role into the prevention and education pillar in the new national drugs strategy. [16701/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that officials from my Department have been members of the Steering Committee tasked with developing a new National Drugs Strategy. The Steering Committee, which has an independent chair, is made up of officials from various Government Departments, offices and state agencies, An Garda Síochána, representatives of the Regional and Local Drug and Alcohol Taskforces, the Community and Voluntary Sector and people who use drugs.

The Steering Committee is working to develop a new National Drugs Strategy which will be submitted to the Minister of State for Communities and the National Drugs Strategy.

As well as being represented on the main Steering Committee, officials from my Department also participated in the work of a Focus Group on Education and Prevention. This was one of a series of Focus Groups established to consider particular themes or strands. The work of the Focus Groups fed into, and informed, the work of the Steering Committee.

In addition, agencies under the aegis of my Department have also contributed to the work of developing the new draft National Drugs Strategy. Given the nature of the remit of my Department and the agencies under its aegis, the main focus of their contribution has been on objectives and actions relating to education and prevention.

These will build on work done to date such as the delivery of SPHE in schools and the provision of Well-being Guidelines for schools. In this work, my Department collaborates with the HSE and the Department of Health through the Health and Well-being partnership. Work being done in schools complements Healthy Ireland, the Government's Framework for Improved Health and Well-being.

DEIS Scheme

43. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will maintain the legacy posts that are vital in those DEIS schools in disadvantaged areas in Dublin's north inner city. [16707/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following the launch of the DEIS Plan 2017, I made it clear that schools currently participating in the DEIS programme would continue to receive the same level of supports under the School Support Programme for the 2017/18 school year. This includes no change to the current situation regarding posts allocated under previous educational disadvantage schemes in DEIS schools, including those in Dublin's north inner city. This is of course subject to the usual arrangements which apply in relation staffing allocations which are based on pupil enrolment.

A central aim of the Plan will be to use available resources to have maximum impact, particularly in communities where there are high concentrations of educational disadvantage. I

wish to promote new approaches in pursuing this objective including initiatives in leadership, clusters and bridges to initiatives from the communities.

I shall also be evaluating the impact of all existing initiatives. This will include an evaluation of teaching resources for schools participating in DEIS to inform future policy in an Irish context.

Pending the outcome of such an evaluation, the current staffing schedule available to primary urban Band 1 schools to provide smaller classes will continue to be applied in addition to teaching posts already available to these schools under previous educational disadvantage schemes.

As with all additional resources provided to schools under the DEIS Programme, these resources should be deployed by schools to meet the objectives of DEIS as set out in the School Plan.

Third Level Funding

44. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that the shortfall in central funding to universities, in addition to the lack of overlap between funding schemes for academic posts and research staff, is narrowing options for early career stage academics and may lead to a loss of domestic talent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16502/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Human capital is a critical factor in reaping economic and social rewards from investment in research. Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for Research and Development, Science and Technology proposes the development of career pathways for researchers to help them maximise their potential and, as a consequence, help to maximise the return on Ireland's investment in innovation and research.

In this regard the Irish Universities Association is developing a draft framework to address these issues. Success in initiatives such as Horizon 2020 will be maximised if researchers are being supported from an early-stage to improve their, and Ireland's, research impact.

The Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, was established to develop a strategy for funding the third level sector. The report outlines the funding challenges in the sector and offers recommendations for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Education Committee for consideration.

In the short term, in Budget 2017 an additional €36.5m has been made available with €160m additional overall agreed for the next three years. This is the first time in nine years that additional Exchequer funding has been secured for the higher education sector. This will assist with demographic increases and initiatives on disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning.

My Department, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, are currently undertaking a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for the higher and further education sectors. The mechanism, which estimates an increase in the National Training Fund levy from 0.7% to 1% between 2018 and 2020, could yield an additional €200m revenue in 2020. Details of the process are available on the websites of both Departments.

It is approaches such as these that will contribute to and inform the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the higher education sector.

In addition to the work being done by the Irish Research Council in the area of human capital, I provided funding in Budget 2017 for the Council to commence in 2017 a new Frontiers Research Programme, which will enable the next generation of researchers to transition to Principal Investigator status.

DEIS Administration

45. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make the new DEIS assessment process more transparent and more reflective of schools' needs and the needs of their pupils in the further rolling out of the new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16503/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The new identification process developed under DEIS Plan 2017 for the assessment of schools uses centrally held data supplied by schools to my Department's Primary and Post Primary Online Databases and CSO Small Area of Population statistics from the National Census of Population 2011 as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. I am satisfied that this data is applied uniformly to all schools in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

The new model is explained in detail in the DEIS plan and on the DES Website. However it is also my intention to make available to all schools detailed information relating to the identification model and how the data is used to determine a schools' level of disadvantage. This will include the importance of quality of Primary and Post Primary Online Database data to the process and of ensuring that school data is sufficiently detailed and up to date, including, where possible, the use of Eircodes. Arrangements for this are in hand and schools will be advised shortly.

In relation to schools who have concerns about their non-inclusion in the most recent round of DEIS, the following process applies.

1. A verification process is currently ongoing in relation to all schools who contacted the Department. This is aimed at ensuring that the model was run correctly and the 2015/16 pupil data supplied by schools through the POD/PPOD systems was correctly used. This process is expected to be concluded shortly and schools will be informed of the results.

2. A further process will take account of updated data as it becomes available. All schools are being contacted to request them to ensure that their POD/PPOD data is fully correct and up to date, including Eircodes. As soon as the updated Census data becomes available, this data will be run through the model with the fully up-to-date POD/PPOD data. If this exercise reveals that any school which did not qualify for DEIS in the February 2017 round actually meets the criteria applicable to schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage based on the fully up-to-date information then it will be included, subject to resources.

3. As part of the announcement made in February, it was made clear that we would continue to refine the model in light of best practice. As part of this process, any other factors raised by schools in the context of their DEIS status will be considered by my Department as part of its delivery of commitments under the DEIS Plan 2017.

In addition to the implementation of this new objective and independent data-based model of identifying levels of disadvantage within school populations, the DEIS Plan 2017 commits to a further programme of work to refine the model in terms of resource allocation to evaluate the impact of individual policy measures and to create a more dynamic model where levels of resources more accurately follow the needs identified by that model.

School Accommodation Provision

46. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Laois will be provided with adequate classroom accommodation for the school year starting September 2017. [16548/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department received an application for capital funding from the school in question in late 2016 to provide a learning support / resource area as well as additional ancillary accommodation.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's current priority has to be focused on the provision of essential classroom accommodation and to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place. All applications for capital funding must be considered in the context of the limited funding available, which must of necessity, be prioritised for this purpose and to provide mainstream classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

My Department has explained to the school that for the reasons I have outlined, it is not possible at this point to approve funding for the ancillary accommodation sought. However, funding has been approved to the school for a learning support / resource area to meet its immediate accommodation needs. The school has recently written to my Department relating to the accommodation approved and my Department will be in further contact with the school shortly following consideration of the correspondence.

Multidenominational Schools

47. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider re-examining the model for teaching of faith formation in the community national schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16700/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Community National School is a new model of multi-denominational school which is not that well-known among the public. However, I believe it has a bright future ahead of it and a major role to play in providing choice to parents in the future.

Community National Schools are multi-denominational and they provide for belief nurturing during the school day. The aim of the model has been to cater for the diversity present within the community in a single school setting. The philosophy of the Community National School as a multi-denominational school is based on best practice in this area, and on each child better understanding and ultimately celebrating both their own and their friends' belief and cultural identities. Belief identity is explicitly not left at the school gate, but used as a means of enriching the learning experience on the basis of mutual understanding and integration.

'Goodness Me, Goodness You' (GMYG) is the patron's programme that underpins the characteristic spirit of CNS schools. GMYG is a common programme suitable for pupils of all faiths

and beliefs and none.

In Junior Infants to 2nd Class, the children follow the GMGY programme together for the majority of the school year, exploring common themes. There is a belief-specific aspect of the programme. In the junior classes only, children have been grouped for a four week period during GMGY time according to their faith or belief tradition, in line with the wishes of their parents. Lesson content was designed specifically for each grouping. In 3rd to 6th class, children remain in their class groups throughout the year and learn about different faiths and religions together. Belief-specific teaching is integrated into GMGY for these classes.

The manner in which schools deliver belief-specific teaching in Junior Infants to 2nd class has evolved. The majority of CNS schools no longer group children according to their beliefs for the four week period. Instead, these schools have integrated belief-specific teaching so that all children learn about different religions and beliefs together and all class groups remain together throughout. As I indicated in a recent statement, I see merit in this approach.

This model has the merit of responding to the needs of parents who wish their children to be able to prepare for specific events - for example Communion and Confirmation in the case of Catholic families – but also respects the best principles of inclusion and mutual understanding that are central to multi-denominational education.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is to commence a review of the GMGY programme for Junior Infants to 2nd class, starting in September 2017. As part of that review, the belief-specific teaching aspect of the programme will be examined. The Education and Training Boards, as patrons, are also looking at how Goodness Me Goodness You can be delivered on the ground in the most inclusive fashion possible. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these processes.

Bullying in Schools

48. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the level of school bullying at primary and second level schools throughout the country; if particular issues have arisen which may benefit from specific attention; if traditional methods of dealing with the issue continue to be effective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16708/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): New anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools were published at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year. The procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils.

All Boards of Management are required to adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of these procedures. A template anti-bullying policy which must be used by all schools for this purpose is included in the procedures.

The procedures for schools outline key principles of best practice for both preventing and tackling bullying and require all schools to commit to these principles in their anti-bullying policy. In particular, they emphasise that a cornerstone in the prevention of bullying is a positive school culture and climate. In that regard, the procedures set out the need for schools to encourage and strengthen open dialogue between all school staff and pupils and to ensure that they provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to raise their concerns in an environment that is comfortable for the pupil.

5 April 2017

The anti-bullying procedures also include specific requirements in relation to the use of prevention and education strategies and the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.

The procedures for schools put in place important new oversight arrangements at school level that involve the school principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

While there is no requirement on schools to report incidents of bullying behaviour to my Department, in the course of their whole school inspection work, my Department's Inspectorate gathers information about how schools deal with bullying in a number of ways through:

- Review of relevant school documentation, including the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policy;

- Meetings with parents and student representatives at which there is an opportunity for parents and students to raise issues where relevant and

- The inclusion of parent and student Questionnaires on items relating to bullying.

Students and parents are also asked to respond to questions about how the school deals with bullying and discipline in the school and whether or not the school provides a safe environment for children.

Where responses indicate that students and/or parent do not believe that bullying is dealt with effectively, Inspectors raise this issue with school management who have ultimate responsibility for Anti-Bullying policies and procedures.

The publication of the new procedures for schools represented the conclusion of just one of the twelve actions set out in the Action Plan on Bullying which was published in January 2013. Other actions that have been progressed include:

- A new national anti-bullying website, *www.tacklebullying.ie*, was launched in November 2015. The website provides a single point of information and support for young people, parents and teachers affected by bullying - My Department supports anti-bullying initiatives aimed at young people such as, the Stand Up! Against Homophobic and Transphobic bullying campaign, organised by BeLonG To, the National Youth Service for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young people in Ireland and the Europe-wide initiative, Safer Internet Day.

- Since 2013 new resources to tackle cyberbullying "UP2US", "My Selfie and the wider world" and "Lockers" were launched through the internet safety initiative, Web wise and an P2US social media roadshow was run in collaboration with Beat 102-103.

Modern Language Teaching

49. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new primary school reform commences; the age at which students will start to learn a foreign language; if the Finnish model of beginning a foreign language at age seven will be adhered to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16620/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Reform of the Primary School Curriculum has already commenced. The National Council for Curriculum and As-

essment (NCCA) has developed a new Integrated Primary Language Curriculum, for English and Irish. Schools have started implementation, on a phased basis, in junior infants to second classes in September 2016, supported by my Department's Professional Development Service for Teachers. Implementation in senior classes (third to sixth classes) will follow in September 2019.

The new Primary Language Curriculum is innovative in aiming to ensure that language skills are transferred effectively, from one language to the other, whether that is English or Irish. Gaining proficiency in both languages will provide pupils with transversal skills that will assist them in learning foreign languages during their post-primary education experience and beyond. Practically all children in our primary schools are studying two languages from an early age.

My Department's Action Plan for Education commits to exploring the potential for the greater use of CLIL (content and language integrated learning) to increase the use of language skills and increase confidence in language learning in a range of language Support Material for teachers has been developed by the NCCA in this area.

Work on the redevelopment of the new Mathematics Curriculum for primary schools has commenced, with implementation scheduled for September 2018 for junior infants to second class.

A review of the overall structure and time allocation in the primary school curriculum is also underway. The target date for completion is Q4, 2018. In this context the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is also developing proposals for provision for Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics at primary level.

Schools Site Acquisitions

50. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding securing a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; when a site is expected to be purchased; the timeframe for works to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16547/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana was announced as part of the Six Year Capital Programme.

Officials in this Department have been liaising with officials in Donegal County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites with regard to the procurement of a suitable site for the campus. A significant number of potential site options were comprehensively technically assessed by officials from my Department in liaison with officials from the Local Authority.

The Deputy will appreciate the importance of a thorough appraisal of site options in order to ensure the achievement of value for money. In this particular case the complexity of the issues associated with the development of the site options under consideration, combined with competing demands on my Department's resources, resulted in a lengthier time for site appraisal than would generally have been the case.

Following on from the site assessment exercise, a preferred site option was identified and officials from Donegal County Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition. These negotiations have not yielded a

positive result to date but are currently ongoing.

At the request of my Department, Council officials have also engaged with the relevant landowners in respect of a second suitable site and this may provide an alternative option, if agreement can be reached on a purchase price.

Due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to provide any further information at this time regarding the negotiation process or the site options. Once a suitable site has been acquired my Department will be in a position to progress the project concerned into the architectural planning process.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

51. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether ASD, autism spectrum disorder, units in mainstream schools for children with autism is the preferred educational environment for children; and his plans with regard to developing and working with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister of State with special responsibility for disabilities to further ASD units. [14830/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's policy, in accordance with Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004, is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs, including Autism, in mainstream school settings, unless such a placement would not be in the best interests of the child concerned, or the children with whom they will be educated.

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special school and special class placements.

For children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, such special school and class placements are provided on the basis of a student-teacher ratio of six to one, along with Special Needs Assistant support.

The establishment of a network of autism-specific special classes in schools across the country has been a key educational priority in recent years.

As Autism can occur along a spectrum, with differing levels of need, there is no one preferred educational environment for children with Autism

Parents are guided on the most appropriate placement by professional assessments which take account of each child's individual needs.

My Department works with service-providing partners in the health and disability sectors to support and plan for the co-ordinated delivery of services to families of children with special educational needs across the disability sector. The interdepartmental cross-sectional Team, comprises of representatives of my Department, the National Educational Psychological Service, the Department of Health, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the National Council for Special Education, and the Health Service Executive.

Preschool Services

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the

accommodation crisis at a school (details supplied) which is forcing the preschool child care facility to seek alternative premises. [16511/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware, from previous questions and correspondence concerning the specific preschool to which the Deputy refers, that the prior approval of the Minister should have been sought, for the pre-school, in order that the overall needs of the school could be accommodated.

There is no provision contained in this year's budget for additional capital investment by my Department specifically in relation to pre-school and after-school services. In general, capital funding by my Department is reserved for provision of school accommodation for primary education upwards. Funding for pre-school services is a matter for my Colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Proposals to the Minister for Education and Skills, to allow use of accommodation for pre-school purposes, during the school day, have been facilitated in the past, provided a school's current and future accommodation needs are not compromised and the consent of the patron has been received. In the case of the school in question, future accommodation needs for the primary school intake will take precedence over the needs of the preschool.

The Department has provided a 24-classroom school at this location to meet its statutory responsibility in respect of primary school provision. It is envisaged that the school will reach full capacity in respect of provision for primary, school-going children, in the 2018/19 academic year.

School Staff

53. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way his Department supports the health and well-being of school staff; the details of the entitlement of such staff in respect of counselling and similar employee supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16507/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has put in place an Occupational Health Strategy as a supportive resource for teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs), to promote their health in the workplace, with a focus primarily on prevention rather than cure. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises of the Employee Assistance and Well-being Programme and Occupational Health Services. These services cater for about 64,000 Teachers and 10,000 Special Needs Assistants in some 4,000 Primary and Post Primary Schools.

The Employee Assistance and Well-being Programme is provided by contract awarded through open tender.

The current service provider is EAP Consultants/Carecall who were awarded the contract with effect from 01 October 2016 following a tendering process carried out by the Office of Government Procurement.

This confidential service is accessible by means of a freephone telephone helpline available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing counselling on a range of personal health and well-being issues given by qualified clinicians. Up to 6 face-to-face counselling sessions are available to provide supportive and solution-focused care based on an individual's clinical needs.

The telephone service also provides specialist information, support and advice in relation to

family, financial, legal, work-related and consumer information services as well as providing management support.

The services are reviewed with the education partners and the service provider on a regular basis.

Special Educational Needs Staff

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the ability of his Department to meet the full requirements in respect of special needs teachers and special needs assistants at primary and second level; the steps being taken to address emerging needs in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16709/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

This year, 13,015 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of the 2016/17 school year, which is an increase of almost 23% in the number of posts available since 2011. The demand for 2017/18 will not be known until the NCSE application process is complete.

There are currently over 12,500 learning support and resource teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools. An additional 900 teaching posts have also been provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

In addition, over 150 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there are now 1,152 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.

125 special schools also provided specialist education for those pupils who need it.

In recent years, the NCSE has provided my Department with a number of policy advice papers on the provision of supports for children with special needs, all of which are available on the NCSE's website. It is intended to bring into effect many improvements to the provision of special educational needs support, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

As committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the adequacy of the present policies and provision and their scope for improvement is being examined. The NCSE are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the SNA Scheme to ensure better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Following its pilot, the new model for allocating special needs teachers has been introduced in schools.

I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required, to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education, will be provided.

55. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has completed the school transport review; if he will implement measures to alleviate the difficulties that arose for many families prior to the commencement of the 2016/2017 school year with particular reference to the availability of concessionary tickets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16712/17]

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 almost 116,000 children, including some 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.

The purpose of the Primary and Post Primary School Transport Schemes is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criterion and are attending their nearest school.

The terms of the scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

The Programme for Government committed to a review of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme. This review was published in December 2016. As part of the review process I also established an Oireachtas Cross Party Working Group to feed into the review and that group met to discuss school transport issues. The review published in December made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

With regard to the charges for concessionary school transport the recommended course of action was to continue with the current position whereby charges remain in place for those in receipt of concessionary places. I agree with this recommendation on the basis that those applying for concessionary transport are making a conscious decision to do so and understand the implications of this choice at the time of application.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and discussions at the Cross Party Working Group I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming years except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

In addition to concessionary transport, a range of submissions relating to the School Transport Scheme generally were received from members of the Oireachtas through the Cross Party Group.

Arising from this, a number of areas were identified which require further examination including options on the implementation of the minimum numbers required for the retention of a service; options on instances where errors occur in categorisation of eligibility and the process around the refund of charges paid in cases where a ticket does not issue.

Finally, the Programme for Government also commits to a review of the criteria and guidelines of the School Transport Appeals Board. This review is currently underway.

School Transport Provision

56. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a contingency plan for the school bus service as a result of the Bus Éireann dispute. [16491/17]

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 almost 116,000 children, including some 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.

School transport services generally are not affected by the Bus Éireann dispute. However, in the region of 1,000 children who normally avail of school transport services on Bus Éireann public scheduled services are affected by the industrial action.

Where a dedicated Bus Éireann service could not operate, a replacement vehicle has been contracted to provide the service.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

57. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on the funds due to the State from religious congregations for the redress scheme; if he has received commitments from the religious congregations regarding the payment of the balance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16705/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I welcome the recent publication of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General Cost of Child Abuse Inquiry and Redress. The report provides an important summary of the current position in relation to the various initiatives taken by successive governments in support of persons who were abused when as children they resided in institutions and it sets out the position in regard to how those initiatives have been funded. The report highlights in particular the fact that the religious congregations who managed many of those institutions will fund at most approximately 21% of the €1.5 billion cost of the response to residential institutional child abuse with the State, i.e. the taxpayer meeting the vast bulk of those costs.

I am disappointed and frustrated that the organisations responsible for protecting children and managing the institutions in which abuse of children took place have failed to adequately contribute towards the cost of the response that has been put in place. It has been the position of successive Governments that, given that the religious congregations were responsible for the management of institutions where horrific abuse of children took place, as documented in the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the "Ryan Report"), they should commit to making further substantial contributions towards the cost of abuse. Having regard to the work of the independent panel's report, the Government adopted a position that the congregations had the resources to bring their contribution over time to 50% of the then estimated costs. Regrettably the congregations have never agreed to this position, with the result that the State has met the bulk of the costs involved.

To date contributions amounting to some €210 million in cash, counselling and property transfers have been made by the 18 religious congregations who managed most of the institutions. These contributions are being made under two rounds: the binding 2002 Indemnity

Agreement and the voluntary offers made in 2009 in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report.

Some €112.9 million of the €128 million (or 88%) provided for under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement has been fully contributed. 11 property transfers remain to be fully completed. Work to complete these transfers is actively progressing and I should point out that in most of the remaining cases the transfer process is at a very advanced stage. It is worth noting also that most of the properties are already in use by the intended recipients.

The offers made in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report by many of the congregations that were party to the 2002 Indemnity Agreement, included cash and properties and were valued by the congregations at €352.6m. I should stress that these offers are voluntary and do not form part of any agreement.

Regrettably one significant element of the most recent offer, relating to playing fields and associated lands, valued at €127 million, was withdrawn by the Christian Brothers. When this is combined with some changes in the valuation of properties previously offered, the total value of the voluntary offers currently in place stands at €193 million, of which contributions of cash and property amounting to some €97.3 million have been realised. It is expected that the outstanding congregational cash contributions will be received by 2018 while work is progressing to complete remaining property transfers.

Schools Building Projects Status

58. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the construction of a school (details supplied) is being delayed. [16497/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The proposed new school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of the tender process with tenders due to be returned by 5pm on 12 April 2017. The project is not being delayed. Subject to no issues arising in the tender process it is envisaged that the project should commence construction before the end of this summer. Appropriate interim accommodation will continue to be provided on the school site pending the completion of the permanent build.

School Textbooks

59. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondary schools that are using tablets alone for school work; if these schemes are deemed to be a success; the number of secondary schools that were using tablets but have reverted to text books; the reason this happened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16544/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, there should be consultation with members of the school community including parents. Guidance is available to schools on planning for the introduction of new technology for teaching and learning. An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the PDST-Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) website, detailing what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

The Department does not gather information on the usage of tablet devices in schools. The 2013 ICT Census in Schools undertaken by the ERC on behalf of the Department, may contain

some information of relevance in this area. This is available at http://www.erc.ie/documents/ict_cencus2013_summaryreport.pdf.

The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

In implementing the Digital Strategy for Schools my Department will expand on the range advice and supports available to schools on the embedding of ICT in teaching and learning.

School Guidance Counsellors

60. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding ex-quota guidance counselling and the announcement in budget 2017. [16489/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The measures announced by my Department as part of Budget 2016 and 2017 mean that 400 guidance posts, or two thirds of the Guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012, will be restored to schools from September 2017.

It has been made clear that all these 400 posts are allocated separately and transparently, and outside of the quota on the normal schedule of posts. This has been made clear in the circular and the schedule of posts which accompanied it. It has also been made clear in all of our communications with schools and with management bodies.

This means that there is now an obligation on schools to ensure that these hours are used for guidance activities. Schools can decide to allocate more hours to guidance than the amount allocated on the schedule. They cannot allocate fewer.

The guidance plan will outline the school's approach to guidance generally, and how students can be supported and assisted in making choices and successful transitions in the personal and social, educational and career areas.

In line with best practice, and in line with practice in the Irish educational system for almost 20 years, the allocation of these hours within the school take place in accordance with the Whole School Guidance Plan.

The guidance counsellor will form a central part of the plan, which sets out how the entire resources of the school will work towards achieving the best possible outcomes for the students in the guidance area. It is likely that the vast majority of these activities will be delivered by guidance counsellors; however, in many schools it will be decided that some activities may be delivered by other staff members - eg year heads. These decisions will depend on the specific needs of the student population.

My Department has also made it clear that schools' guidance plans should include specified time allocation for guidance counsellors to be available for one to one guidance counselling, and time allocation for the role in supporting the organisation and work of the Student Support Team.

As part of the Whole School Evaluation process, inspectors in the Department of Education

and Skills examine guidance provision in schools, including confirming that a whole-school guidance plan is in place. The Department's Inspectorate also has a specific programme of guidance inspections in schools.

Following a school inspection any recommendations made by an inspector will be communicated to the school, and the Board of Management and patron body will be required to implement these recommendations. The Inspectorate carry out follow-through inspections to monitor compliance by schools with recommendations made.

The Department, in determining its inspection programme for schools, will take into account all information available to it, including where a complaint has been made regarding non-compliance, and decisions around inspections will be based on this information.

Brexit Issues

61. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his key principles with respect to Brexit negotiations. [16488/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Last week saw the formal start of the UK's exit from the EU. I welcome the clarity that the UK Prime Minister's announcement brought. Adopting a proactive approach from the start, the Irish Government has been comprehensively preparing for this very eventuality. The contingency framework that the Government put in place maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. My own Department contributed fully to the preparation of the education components of that framework. While negotiations on the UK/EU relationship post-Brexit have not yet begun the results of our overall analysis, consultations and planning now enable us to move confidently to that next phase.

It is my priority to continue to engage actively on a number of fronts in dealing with the impact of Brexit on the Education sector. Consultation has been fundamental to my Department's preparations for Brexit. We have consulted extensively with our stakeholders. Between December and January both I and Minister of State Halligan have led consultations with stakeholders from right across the higher education, further education and training; and primary and post-primary education sectors.

Among the key issues identified in these consultations are Brexit's likely impact on the future of the Common Travel Area and its implications for students, teachers, academic staff and researchers, mutual recognition of qualifications, UK/Ireland research collaboration and partnerships between education institutions and enterprise as well as the implications for EU funding for research and the impact on EU funding programmes such as Horizon2020, PEACE IV and Erasmus+.

All of these issues will be factored in to my Department's overall approach to future discussions and negotiations and to our input to Government's preparations for EU-UK negotiations. Both I and my Department will continue to consult with the sector interests as necessary through the period ahead.

Engagement at political and institutional level has been another key part of my approach. I have met my counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and most recently I met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. I have also recently held meetings with the Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Keir Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. I have also had meetings with Ministers from other EU

Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission.

I look forward to building on this engagement over the coming months in order to ensure that our priorities are to the fore, are fully understood and taken into account.

Early Childhood Care and Education Standards

62. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way he envisages his Department interacting with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to make more seamless and develop specific numeracy and literacy skills in the transition of a child from ECCE, early childhood care and education, to first year in primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16543/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is extremely close cooperation between my Department and the NCCA and the DCYA in relation to these matters. The development of curriculums for both primary school and for early years education settings is the remit of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. NCCA is currently consulting on the structure of the primary curriculum and how it may be more closely aligned with the Aistear curriculum framework. The Early Years Education Policy unit of my Department is co-located with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and advises DCYA on matters relating to educational quality and provision in early years. Currently, the National Síolta Aistear Initiative is being rolled out across by my Department's unit in partnership with the NCCA, DCYA, the City and County Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

Since 2015, a new unit in my Department's inspectorate has piloted and is now nationally rolling out education-focussed early years inspections at the behest of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in ECCE settings. Inspections against a quality framework examine educational issues including how educational transitions from ECCE into the primary school is prepared for.

In addition, arising from recommendations in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011, the NCCA are developing templates so that educational information about a child will transfer from early years settings into primary school. Extensive research and consultation has been completed and piloting of templates in a wide range of both early years settings and primary school is underway. Full implementation of an agreed template is scheduled for 2018.

Schools Building Projects Status

63. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of proposed building extensions at secondary schools (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16702/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that a building project for each of the three schools referred to in the details supplied is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021).

In the case of the first and second named schools, my Department has undertaken site visits to the schools in the context of initiating the planning work for the building projects.

It is my Department's intention to arrange a site visit to the third named school and my Department will be in contact with the school in due course to arrange the visit.

Schools Building Projects Status

64. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school building project (details supplied) in County Kildare. [16549/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents. All applications for Statutory Approvals have been lodged and the Disability Access Certificate has been secured.

The Department and its design team are currently engaged with the Local Authority regarding the planning application, including dealing with a Request for Further Information.

When all Statutory Approvals are secured the Design Team will finalise the Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design submission which will be submitted to the Department for review. Following receipt and consideration of that report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

National Training Fund

65. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the surplus of the national training fund. [16501/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Prior to 2012 income from the National Training Fund (NTF) levy had fallen from a high of €413m in 2008 to €299m. However, since 2012, receipts from the NTF levy have increased annually, due to improved employment levels. The accumulated surplus in the Fund has been critical in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the provision of training for the unemployed, in a period when receipts were falling.

It is considered prudent to continue to maintain an adequate surplus in the Fund to meet demand in future years and while the surplus represents a very significant sum, it would only cover 7 months NTF expenditure at current levels. In addition, the operation of the EU Fiscal Rules and the inclusion of the NTF in my Department's overall annual expenditure ceiling mean that, in the absence of an increased rate of contribution, additional expenditure cannot be sourced from the NTF without a corresponding drop in Exchequer expenditure. The surplus remains available for investment in education and training programmes to meet skills needs.

I am reviewing the allocation of funding to programmes in the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors as between NTF and Exchequer sources in terms both of the emphasis required on training for employment and training persons in employment and of satisfying the needs of enterprise to meet strategic skills requirements. One objective of this review is to direct NTF allocations in a manner that best reflects enterprise priorities as identified through the revised national skills architecture.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

66. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reasons a parent has no appeals process with respect to the allocations of learning support and resource hours. [16490/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation model 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.

Under the previous allocation model there was no recourse to either parents or schools to appeal the General Allocation of resources for schools, which were based on set levels of allocation per school enrolments.

The NCSE appeal process for parents and schools, which had been in place under the previous allocation model, related only to applications for support to the NCSE to provide additional resource teaching time to schools for individual pupils assessed as having low incidence special educational needs.

As the revised allocation model provides a baseline allocation for all schools, combined with a school profiled allocation, it no longer includes a requirement for applications to be made to the NCSE to provide supports for individual children, who would have previously qualified under the low incidence special educational needs category.

Accordingly, there is therefore no longer a requirement, or necessity, for parents to appeal an application made to the NCSE to have additional resource hours allocated to a school to support their child.

The new model provides one single allocation to schools based on the profile. Schools will be frontloaded with resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils who need such support.

Where parents have concerns that their child is not getting access to the support the child needs, they should raise this concern with the Principal and in the event that they are not happy with the response they should raise this with the Board of Management.

As the profiled allocation is made to the school, schools may appeal the basis of this allocation and specifically whether the data used to calculate the profile was correct and whether it was correctly applied in the case of the school.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie. Should a school wish to appeal they should do so by March 31st 2017.

Schools will be able to appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools should read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relates to the breakdown of the allocation, which

may be under consideration for appeal.

The model will also allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. The National Council for Special Education will support schools in managing their special education teaching allocations in the first instance. Only in very exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the schools profile has changed very significantly since the allocation was made to the school, may an additional allocation of hours be made to the school.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

Schools Building Projects Status

67. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied) regarding its application on the school building programme for the development of a new school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16493/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme (2019/21).

My Department has identified a suitable site as a permanent location for the school to which he refers and the acquisition process is underway. Discussions are ongoing in relation to the provision of access to the site and officials in my Department are working with officials from Westmeath County Council in this regard.

I can assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for the Department and officials are working to complete this process as expeditiously as possible.

My Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authorities concerned in the context of progressing the project through the architectural planning process.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

68. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions he has had with Ministers in respect of the redress scheme; if he has spoken to the chief executive officer of Caranua; the amount that remains in Caranua funds for distribution to persons entitled to support from funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16516/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. The legislation provides that €110 million in contributions from religious congregations will be made available to Caranua to help meet the needs of persons who, as children, were abused in residential institutions. To date some €97 million, comprising contributions and associated in-

terest, have been received from congregations and deposited in the special investment account opened by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) in accordance with section 29 of the 2012 Act. It is expected that the remaining congregational contributions earmarked for Caranua will be received by 2018.

I understand that in the period from its establishment in March 2013 to end December 2016 Caranua had expended some €56 million in support of former residents together with some €5 million on administration costs.

I had a very useful meeting with the Chair and Chief Executive of Caranua in December 2016 and my officials hold regular meeting with Caranua to discuss a range of relevant matters.

Caranua operates independently of the redress scheme administered by the Residential Institutions Redress Board.

School Curriculum

69. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will conduct a review of the leaving certificate science curriculum in view of the fact that students who commenced their second level education in 2016 have commenced the new junior cycle science curriculum. [16714/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): With regard to the Leaving Certificate Science subjects, new draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics have been prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). A very important feature of these new specifications is the introduction of practical assessment components. The NCCA has recommended that, in each of these subjects, there should be a 90-minute, externally-assessed practical examination, attracting 30% of the overall marks for the Leaving Certificate examination. Candidates will be directly assessed by observation of how they perform the practical activities and indirectly assessed through a subsequent assessment of the work they generate.

As this is a new development, the specifications have been approved by my Department, on a provisional basis, pending a trial of the assessment arrangements. The State Examinations Commission (SEC), in consultation with the NCCA, has been asked by my Department to carry out this trial and preparations are well underway. The trial is planned to take place during the fourth quarter of 2017, as outlined in my Department's Action Plan for Education 2017, and is likely to involve approximately twenty-five schools. The SEC has, in the past week, issued an invitation to schools to take part in the trial. Students from Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry, and Physics classes will participate. In some schools the trial will be in just one of the subjects, while others will have the trial practical examination in two or all three subjects. This is to ensure that the feasibility and implications of running such examinations in all three subjects are properly assessed.

In addition to these developments, the NCCA has completed a new subject specification for Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science and this has been approved by my Department for implementation.

These developments provide important opportunities to increase interest in and take-up of STEM subjects and progress the Action Plan for Education.

Third Level Funding

70. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his examinations of the Cassells report on the funding of third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16494/17]

73. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for finalising decisions on third level funding and implications for student fees arising out of the Cassells report; his plans with regard to the third level registration fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16506/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 73 together.

The Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, under the chairmanship of Peter Cassells, was established to develop a strategy for funding the third level sector. The report outlines the funding challenges in the sector and offers recommendations for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills for consideration. However, it is important to recognise, as the Cassells Report has done, that doing nothing is not an option and that other measures to improve equality of access will also be necessary.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education my Department and I also have to consider the immediate challenges and in that context the Department placed a particular focus on this area in Budget 2017 securing additional funding for the sector for the first time in recent years. In Action Plan Education 2017, Higher Education will be a particular focus.

In Budget 2017 an additional €36.5m has been made available with €160m additional overall agreed for the next three years. This is the first time in nine years that additional Exchequer funding has been secured for the higher education sector. This will assist with demographic increases and initiatives on disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning.

My Department, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, are currently undertaking a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for the higher and further education sectors. The mechanism, which estimates an increase in the National Training Fund levy from 0.7% to 1% between 2018 and 2020, could yield an additional €200m revenue in 2020. Details of the process are available on the websites of both Departments. This review will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

It is approaches such as these that will contribute to and inform the development of a long-term sustainable funding model.

Multidenominational Schools

71. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of the advice given by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, to his Department regarding the separation of children for faith formation in community national schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16699/17]

81. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the situation in community national schools regarding the separation of children for faith formation classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16698/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 81 together.

The Community National School is a new model of multi-denominational school which is not that well-known among the public. However, I believe it has a bright future ahead of it and a major role to play in providing choice to parents in the future.

Community National Schools are multi-denominational and they provide for belief nurturing during the school day. The aim of the model has been to cater for the diversity present within the community in a single school setting. The philosophy of the Community National School as a multi-denominational school is based on best practice in this area, and on each child better understanding and ultimately celebrating both their own and their friends' belief and cultural identities. Belief identity is explicitly not left at the school gate, but used as a means of enriching the learning experience on the basis of mutual understanding and integration.

'Goodness Me, Goodness You' (GMGY) is the patron's programme that underpins the characteristic spirit of CNS schools and is a common programme suitable for pupils of all faiths and beliefs. The GMGY programme is being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and delivered on an action research basis. The action research approach allows for the development of the curriculum with the content and approaches being adjusted and adapted based on feedback on the material and methodologies.

In Junior Infants to 2nd Class, the children follow the GMGY programme together for the majority of the school year, exploring common themes. There is a belief-specific aspect of the programme. In the junior classes only, children have been grouped for a four week period during GMGY time according to their faith or belief tradition, in line with the wishes of their parents. Lesson content was designed specifically for each grouping. In 3rd to 6th class, children remain in their class groups throughout the year and learn about different faiths and religions together. Belief-specific teaching is integrated into GMGY for these classes.

The manner in which schools deliver belief-specific teaching in Junior Infants to 2nd class has evolved. The majority of CNS schools no longer group children according to their beliefs for the four week period. Instead, these schools have integrated belief-specific teaching so that all children learn about different religions and beliefs together and all class groups remain together throughout. As I indicated in a recent statement, I see merit in this approach.

This model has the merit of responding to the needs of parents who wish their children to be able to prepare for specific events - for example Communion and Confirmation in the case of Catholic families – but also respects the best principles of inclusion and mutual understanding that are central to multi-denominational education.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is to commence a review of the GMGY programme for Junior Infants to 2nd class, starting in September 2017. As part of that review, the belief-specific teaching aspect of the programme will be examined. The Education and Training Boards, as patrons, are also looking at how Goodness Me Goodness You can be delivered on the ground in the most inclusive fashion possible. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these processes.

Third Level Participation

72. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on County Wexford's low third level educational attainment rates, which according to the Wexford Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021, are the third lowest in the country; the actions he is

taking to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16542/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The higher education system continues to respond strongly to the challenge of meeting Ireland's human capital needs. While the economic recovery has created a strong and growing demand for graduate level employment, the higher education system continues to expand and enrol more students, and to provide an increasing supply of graduates for the labour market. Overall student numbers in the sector increased from 196,000 in 2011/12 to about 210,000 in 2014/15. In addition to this general growth, additional programmes have been put in place to address specific skills needs, through the Springboard+ programme and the ICT skills initiatives.

The performance of the Higher Education system in meeting human capital needs is also strong by comparison with other European countries: Ireland has one of the highest rates of 30–34-year-olds with higher education attainment, and Ireland performs particularly strongly in terms of graduates with STEM qualifications when considered against fellow EU member countries.

Ireland ranks 3rd in the EU28 in its tertiary attainment rate (Higher Education Qualification) (52.3% in 2015) for 30 – 34 year olds. We are still significantly ahead of the EU28 average which rested at 38.7% in 2015. This strong performance is confirmed in the recent OECD publication *Education at a Glance* which was published on 15 September 2016 and which placed Ireland 6th in the OECD in terms of its Tertiary Attainment Rate amongst 25-34 year olds.

International benchmarks show that Ireland continues to be a leading European country in overall educational attainment at tertiary level, and particularly so for younger cohorts of the population. This reflects both the strong demand for tertiary education in Ireland and the strong incentives that are built into the funding model to encourage institutions to seek higher enrolment numbers.

The latest information available from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) demonstrates that the total number of graduates who gave their County of origin as Wexford, from all HEA funded Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), was 1,610 in 2014/15. This is an increase of 13% over five years from the equivalent figure of 1,424 in 2010/2011.

Next Steps:

The outlook for future skills needs shows demand for higher education graduates from enterprise continuing to increase, along with growing demands from the increasing pool of school leavers.

The implementation of a System Performance Framework, Strategic Dialogue and the agreement of compacts with the Higher Education Institutions underpins a changed relationship between the State and the higher education system, and this provides for a new level of accountability for public funding against national objectives.

I published the second Systems Performance Report in December 2016 and this reviewed the performance of the higher education system for the years 2014 and 2015, in critical areas such as access and its responsiveness to skills needs of the economy.

I am now developing a new Systems Performance Framework for the period 2017 – 2021 which will set out the ambition, goals and objectives for higher education for this five year period.

In terms of County Wexford specifically, one of the most ambitious objectives of the System Performance Framework is an extensive restructuring of the higher education landscape,

involving institutional mergers and new collaborative arrangements.

The Institute of Technology Carlow already have a Wexford Campus, based in Wexford Town, which offers an extensive range of award qualifications from Level 6 through to post-graduate Level 9 on the national Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

I can also assure the Deputy that there are plans in place for the development of a Technological University for the whole South-East region. The Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) project was initiated in 2011 and consists of a consortium involving the Institute of Technology Carlow and Waterford Institute of Technology.

Strategic vision for TUSE:

The core elements of a new agreed vision and values for the TUSE have already been set out by both Institutes and includes a commitment to:

- A systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world;
- Advancing knowledge through research and scholarship;
- Dissemination of this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise;
- Particular regard to the needs of the region.

In relation to the legislation, to underpin the development of Technological Universities, the third Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage.

Following the finalisation of the ongoing consultation process I will then advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised.

In addition to the merger projects, work is ongoing on greater inter-institutional collaboration in order to enhance the ability of institutions to respond to regional needs. The implementation of actions in the National Skills Strategy including the further development and work of the Regional Skills Fora which will be responsible for bringing together higher and further education providers to better align education provision with skills needs. Further actions include the planned entrepreneurship education policy statement and foreign languages in education strategy and implementation of the ICT skills action plan and ongoing engagement between higher education and employer interests will all contribute to addressing the issues raised in the coming years.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 70.

Schools Building Projects Status

74. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a project (details supplied) will be advised as to whether its revised building project to relieve overcrowding will be funded by his Department; the timeframe for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16696/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was approved funding to build 2 mainstream classrooms and 2 resource rooms

under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2013.

The school authority recently submitted an alternative proposal to use the approved funding to provide a range of different and mostly ancillary accommodation and works to the external environment none of which reflects the original approval given. Critically, the extra main-stream classes approved were not included in the proposal.

The school authority have been informed that this development is not acceptable to the Department. It has also been informed that the funding is still available to build the accommodation that was originally approved. My Department awaits to hear from the school in this matter.

Legislative Programme

75. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16509/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government outlines that this Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities. This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030. With regard to the institute of technology sector, the Strategy recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation within the sector and a pathway of evolution for those consolidated institutes of technology, to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities.

In relation to the legislation, the third Government Legislative Programme of this Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage.

I recognise that there were a significant number of matters raised previously in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage. It is my intention to consult with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government. Following the finalisation of this consultation process I will then advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised as part of this consultation process.

School Equipment

76. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand on information technology training and ongoing support provided to teachers using tablets in the classroom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16545/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, there should be consultation with members of the school community including parents.

An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the Professional Development Service for Teachers (Technology in Education - PDST TIE) website detailing what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

The PDST TIE, which operates under the remit of my Department, provides a range of support services for schools on the effective use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment. Details of its supports are available on its website www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie.

The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

As part of this Strategy my Department will:

- Develop a digital learning framework to provide schools with clarity on how to embed ICT in teaching, learning and assessment. The framework will assist the Department and its support services in providing appropriate support materials and services to principals and teachers on embedding ICT into their practice and will inform the design of all future teacher professional learning opportunities.
- Provide advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools that are best-suited to support learning and teaching in schools supported by best practice videos and case studies.
- Enhance the access to and impact of CPD delivery formats to include online and blended learning programmes.
- Ensure consistency of approach in the embedding of ICT in CPD and other support services for schools.
- Update the eLearning Planning resource for schools (step by step guide to the development of the school's e-Learning Plan).
- Enable schools to access high quality digital content and promote the sharing of digital resources and good practice among teachers.

The implementation of the strategy is currently underway. Funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure is committed towards its implementation including €30m already distributed to schools in the current school year, rising to €50m annually towards the end of the Strategy.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

77. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans with regard to providing applied behavioural analysis, ABA, schools for children with autism; the number of such schools currently funded by his Department; his plans to increase the supply of ABA schools; the reviews regarding the performance and outcomes of ABA schools which have been undertaken by his Department in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16711/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's policy is to promote a child-centred approach to education of all children with special educational needs, including those with autism, in school settings.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional

teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special school and special class placements.

This network includes 126 ASD early intervention classes, 526 primary ASD classes and 236 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools and 125 Special School of which 20 are ASD special schools.

My Department previously funded 13 centres through an ABA pilot scheme funded for the period 1999-2011. All of these centres applied for and were granted provisional recognition as special schools for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in 2010 and are currently being supported by my Department under a transitional agreement. These schools now form part of the network of specialised placements for students with ASD.

As each child with autism is unique, they should have access to a range of different approaches to meet their individual needs. This facilitates access to individualised education programmes which can be supported by Special Needs Assistants and fully qualified professional teachers who may draw from a range of autism-specific interventions, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Treatment and Education of Autistic Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) as well as the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible, of full or partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

The use of ABA as part of the range of interventions may be particularly useful for addressing behavioural issues. My Department supports the use of ABA and training is provided for teachers in its use.

However, my Department does not accept, based on research, advice and best practice, that ABA should be the only approach used. While ABA may help to improve behaviour, other approaches, such as a number of those, to which I have referred, are just as important in developing children's communication and speech skills.

All recognised schools must operate in line with this policy. This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and the NCSE's policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

Education Expenditure

78. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Ireland already spends more per student than most other EU countries; the spending increases that should be expected in conjunction with primary school reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16619/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the most recent data available, Ireland ranked 10th among EU countries in terms of annual expenditure on educational institutions per student. Further information in this context is available in the OECD's 2016 Education at a Glance Report (with particular reference to indicators B1 and B3), available on the OECD i-Library website. (Link: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2016_eag-2016-en)

In relation to spending increases associated with primary school reform, it is not possible at this stage to accurately project the increases that may be necessary. The Action Plan for Education 2016-2017 includes actions related to the continued rollout of the new Primary Languages Curriculum, development of a new Primary Mathematics Curriculum, as well as a broad review of the structure of, and time allocation for, the Primary School Curriculum. This review is being conducted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which advises my Department on curriculum matters generally. In addition to curriculum development costs arising for the NCCA, the implementation and development of new and revised curricula gives rise to costs in terms of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) required for teachers in schools. Some infrastructural costs may also arise.

Skills Development

79. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is actively working and co-operating with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation on research and development at Cavan Institute or Monaghan Institute on initiatives to attract jobs to Counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14434/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Both Cavan Institute and Monaghan Institute are operated by Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB). CMETB works closely with both local authorities in Cavan and Monaghan as well as the local enterprise offices to ensure that the skills set is available in both counties to permit the growth and development of indigenous industry and meet the skills needs of those seeking to invest in the region.

In association with the Local Enterprise Office in Cavan, CMETB has supported the development of a Cavan employers HR and Skills Network Forum.

The Regional Skills Forum Manager facilitates ongoing collaboration between employers and education and training providers in the region, with the view to providing targeted skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy. This has the effect of increasing the supply of skills to the labour market, thereby addressing skills shortages, supporting job creation and overall economic growth and development in Cavan and Monaghan.

CMETB facilitated a skills audit in Cavan and Monaghan and are responding to the needs identified in that audit. CMETB Training Services are working closely with the Agrifood industry in Cavan and Monaghan to meet identified skills needs in food preparation and manufacturing. It is consulting with the Hospitality sector including the Restaurant Association of Ireland and a number of employers in the local hospitality sector with a view to establishing a Professional Cookery traineeship to support the local food industry.

There are currently 166 registered employers of apprentices in Cavan and Monaghan and 334 registered apprentices. CMETB Training Services are also involved in the development of a number of new apprenticeships and is leading out on the development of two new programmes in the areas of engineering and HGV driving.

CMETB is engaging with indigenous companies and employers in the region to encourage up-skilling and development which will equip companies to grow. This function is delivered through its Training Services with courses based at Monaghan Education Campus and Monaghan Institute and also in the new Cavan Further Education and Training Campus.

Facilities in the new Cavan FET campus include general classrooms, IT rooms as well as

an electrical installation classroom, delivering courses on smart technology, multimedia, IT support, healthcare and electrical installation. The army garage building has been upgraded to deliver a welding and fabrication course.

Additional provision in the area of skills for work, adult literacy and basic skills services are also provided by Cavan Institute and Monaghan Institute supporting workforce development in line with national skills policy. CMETB through Cavan Institute and Monaghan Institute is also providing bespoke training to a range of companies in Cavan and Monaghan

Cavan Institute and Monaghan Institute are also providing an extensive range of post-leaving certificate courses to over 1,600 learners comprising school leavers and mature learner in a broad range of provision aimed at providing suitably qualified graduates for the local jobs market in a broad range of sectors. Both colleges work closely with employers through their work experience programmes.

The very broad range of activity and engagement by CMETB with learners, employers and enterprise demonstrates its commitment to ensuring the delivery of high quality training and skills to attract and retain investment and job opportunities for the region.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

80. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the successful schools will be announced for summer works in categories other than those announced in April 2016; the reason the process is taking so long; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16710/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis for the years 2016 and 2017. Nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the (SWS) which reflects a very high demand.

Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April 2016 and are published on my Department's website www.education.ie.

Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. I expect to be in a position to announce a further round of the SWS in due course.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 71.

School Staff

82. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received advice on the legality of proposals to select members of ASTI for redundancies at the end of this school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16540/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I note that the ASTI's Central Executive Council announced at the weekend that it would hold a ballot for industrial action over the potential redundancy of ASTI member teachers.

The protection from compulsory redundancy that public servants have arises from commitments given by the Government under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. This protection is not available to those who are outside the terms of that Agreement. By deciding to reject the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the ASTI has placed its members outside that Agreement and has decided that the Agreement's benefits and protections will not apply to its members. My Department made this position clear to the ASTI prior to its recent ballot.

The process of identifying staff surpluses takes place in the first half of each year and takes effect from the start of the following school year. The process operates and deals with any surplus for the following school year.

The process for the 2017/18 school year is currently under way in my Department. 60 secondary schools were identified as possible surplus schools for the 2017/18 school year. These 60 schools received a letter notifying them of their surplus and were given an opportunity to respond to same. This represents the total number of schools where potential surpluses could arise.

However, at this stage of the process it is too early to say what the final position as regards the level of surplus will be, either generally or in particular schools. The level of surplus is influenced by many factors including retirements, career breaks, job-sharing etc. and additional allocations for the forthcoming year in respect of demographics. This continues to evolve as new information is received from relevant schools. Given that Budgets 2016 and 2017 did not negatively impact on teacher allocations, it would not be surprising that the level of redeployment would be lower than in recent years.

My Department expects to know the final position in relation to the number of surplus teachers shortly. This is no different to what has transacted in previous years.

DEIS Status

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria for DEIS status, in view of the fact that a school in an area (details supplied) has been refused DEIS status while surrounding schools in the same socioeconomic area have attained it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16539/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS Plan 2017 provides for a new identification model for assessment of a school's level of disadvantage using centrally held data. The key data sources are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases and the CSO Small Area of Population (SAP) data from Census 2011 as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index). This data provides information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of each individual school and is applied uniformly across all schools in the country, including schools in the area mentioned by the Deputy. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools.

In its initial application, the new identification model has identified that there are schools in disadvantaged areas, not previously included in DEIS, whose level of disadvantage is at the same level as the current DEIS category for schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage. Accordingly, we are moving as a first step to include these schools in the DEIS

Programme with effect from September 2017.

The implementation of a new objective central data-based model of identifying levels of disadvantage within school populations will be followed by a further programme of work to create a more dynamic model where levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by that model. Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

The next phase of the identification process will be to update the model to take account of 2016 National Census data and 2016/17 online pupil data. These updated data will facilitate a further assessment of all schools and will be possible when the updated datasets are available later this year.

The DEIS Plan provides for a verification process and any school wishing to seek verification of the information used to assess the level of disadvantage of its pupil cohort may submit an application for same to social_inclusion@education.gov.ie

School Admissions

84. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Nils Muižnieks, relating to religious discrimination in school admissions and in the running of schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16704/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The report referred to by the Deputy recommends that the exemption provided for denominational schools in Section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000 should be removed.

In this regard as the Deputy will be aware, I commenced a public consultation process from 24th January to 20th March 2017 on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

I have stated that I believe that it is unfair that preference is given by publicly funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school.

I also believe that it is unfair that parents, who might otherwise not do so, feel pressure to baptise their children in order to gain admission to the local school and I intend to reform the school admissions system in relation to the role that religion can play in that process.

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

- A catchment area approach, prohibiting religious schools from giving preference to children of their own religion who live outside the catchment area ahead of non-religious children who live inside the catchment;
- A 'nearest school rule', allowing religious schools to give preference to a religious child only where it is that child's nearest school of that particular religion;
- A quota system, which would allow a religious school give preference to children of its own religion in respect of only a certain proportion of places, meaning that the remaining places would be allocated based on other admissions criteria – proximity to the school, lottery etc.;

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

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

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

My Department has begun the process of examining the submissions and formulating next steps. I will then develop and implement measures to deal with this issue.

With regard to the teaching of religion in schools, Article 44 of the Constitution and Section 30 of the Education Act 1998 provides that parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes if they so wish.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school’s arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. This is an important measure which will help ensure transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard.

School Staff

85. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) wishes to retain an extra school teacher it acquired in 2016; if the school can retain the extra teacher it acquired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16498/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year (Circular 0017/2017) were published recently.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 501 pupils on the 30th September 2016. As set out in the staffing schedule, the enrolment figure required to retain the 19th classroom teaching post is 502 pupils.

For 2017/18 an additional Special Education Post (S.E.T. Post) has been allocated to this school under the new Special Education allocation model. This revised allocation process will replace the General Allocation Model and English as Additional Language Support (GAM/EAL) scheme, whereby a general allocation of resources had previously been allocated to primary schools annually.

The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the criteria for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule, Circular 0017/2017.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

86. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reverse the decision to make cutbacks in the provision of all learning support in English and mathematics and in the provision of resource hours at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16499/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school, 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.

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 for additional supports to over 1200 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 60 hours for the 2016/17 school year, which combined with 55.25 resource teaching hours allocated to the school by the National Council for Special Education, gave a total allocation to the school of 115.25 additional teaching hours for the 2016/17 school year.

The profiled allocation for the school had indicated an allocation requirement of 102.5 hours for this school for 2017/18, which would have resulted in a nominal reduction of 12.75 hours.

However, as no school will receive an allocation less than their 2016/17 allocation, the school has maintained its existing level of allocation.

The special education teaching allocation for this school for 2017/18 is 115.25 hours.

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

It should also not be assumed that the potential reduction indicated for this school will be applied in the future, when the next profiling exercise occurs, as a new profiled allocation will be calculated at that time, which will take into account any changes to the school population or profile.

DES Circulars 0013 and 0014 2017 advised schools that any future adjustments to the allocations for schools will take place on a graduated basis, which will take account of changes to school enrolments, and the pupil population, including the number of pupils in the complex needs category, since the initial allocations were developed.

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 also 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.

Summer Works Scheme

87. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when decisions will be made on summer works scheme 2017 applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16713/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis for the

years 2016 and 2017

Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced last April and are published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. I expect to be in a position to announce a further round of the SWS in due course.

Youthreach Programme Staff

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if revised pay scales and allowances for persons recruited to certain direct entry grades are applicable to the position of Youthreach resource person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16697/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm for the Deputy that revised payscales and allowances for persons recruited to certain direct entry grades resulting from the implementation of Government Decisions, FEMPI legislation and various National Pay Agreements are applicable to the position of Youthreach Resource Persons.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

89. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure adequate places in schools in County Cork for those children on the autism spectrum. [16706/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, including Autism. It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in communities where the need for such classes has been identified.

Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools and are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

Students enrolled in special classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities.

There are 13 Special Schools in Cork city and county. Special Schools funded by my Department are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs

from 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

Special Schools are staffed in accordance with arrangements set out in my Department's Circular 0042/2011, which provides for enhanced pupil teacher ratios for pupils attending Special Schools ranging from 6-1, to 12-1, on the basis of disability categorisation of pupils attending the school.

Many special schools now enrol students from disability categories other than from those provided for by their school designations.

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

With regard to Cork City and County, there are 145 ASD special classes. Of these, 24 are ASD early intervention classes, 80 are primary ASD classes and 41 are post-primary ASD classes.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, must take into account the present and future potential need, location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas. In this regard the NCSE has advised that they are continuing to engage with schools in opening special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision and in order to ensure there are sufficient placements available to meet demand.

Parents/guardians may contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs and to seek assistance in identifying placement options, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Placement

90. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the allocation of national school places for the Swords catchment area. [16510/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is aware of the enrolment issues in the area referred to by the Deputy and is in ongoing direct contact with a number of the primary school in respect of their junior infant capacity.

As the Deputy may be aware, there are 13 primary schools in the area referred to of which 11 schools enrol junior infants: two of the schools are Senior Primary Schools catering for 3rd to 6th class only.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has been advised by at least two of the primary schools that they have junior infant places currently available. A number of schools have also expressed a willingness to offer further junior infant places for September 2017, if necessary. My Department expect that the position will be further clarified when the schools concerned finalise their enrolments process in the coming weeks.

While I understand that the enrolment situation may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice, my Department's main responsibility is to ensure that the existing schools in the area can, between them, cater for the demand for Junior Infant places in September 2017.

Schools Building Projects Status

91. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expedite the construction of a school (details supplied) in view of significant past delays with the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16492/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that my Department understands that tenders for the project to which he refers issued on 3 April, 2017.

The Tender return date is 10 May 2017.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Design Team for the project is working to an accelerated programme to ensure that the new school building will be ready for occupation for September, 2018. My Department will continue to monitor progress on the project, which is being delivered by the local authority, to ensure that this delivery date is achieved.

School Guidance Counsellors

92. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the commitment in the confidence and supply arrangement on career guidance counsellors and the implementation of same. [16457/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The measures announced by my Department as part of Budget 2016 and 2017 mean that 400 guidance posts, or two thirds of the Guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012, will be restored to schools from September 2017.

It has been made clear that all these 400 posts are allocated separately and transparently, and outside of the quota on the normal schedule of posts. This has been made clear in the circular and the schedule of posts which accompanied it. It has also been made clear in all of our communications with schools and with management bodies.

This means that there is now an obligation on schools to ensure that these hours are used for guidance activities. Schools can decide to allocate more hours to guidance than the amount allocated on the schedule. They cannot allocate fewer.

The guidance plan will outline the school's approach to guidance generally, and how students can be supported and assisted in making choices and successful transitions in the personal and social, educational and career areas.

In line with best practice, and in line with practice in the Irish educational system for almost 20 years, the allocation of these hours within the school take place in accordance with the Whole School Guidance Plan.

The guidance counsellor will form a central part of the plan, which sets out how the entire resources of the school will work towards achieving the best possible outcomes for the students in the guidance area. It is likely that the vast majority of these activities will be delivered by guidance counsellors; however, in many schools it will be decided that some activities may be delivered by other staff members - eg year heads. These decisions will depend on the specific needs of the student population.

My Department has also made it clear that schools' guidance plans should include specified

time allocation for guidance counsellors to be available for one to one guidance counselling, and time allocation for the role in supporting the organisation and work of the Student Support Team.

As part of the Whole School Evaluation process, inspectors in the Department of Education and Skills examine guidance provision in schools, including confirming that a whole-school guidance plan is in place. The Department's Inspectorate also has a specific programme of guidance inspections in schools.

Following a school inspection any recommendations made by an inspector will be communicated to the school, and the Board of Management and patron body will be required to implement these recommendations. The Inspectorate carry out follow-through inspections to monitor compliance by schools with recommendations made.

The Department, in determining its inspection programme for schools, will take into account all information available to it, including where a complaint has been made regarding non-compliance, and decisions around inspections will be based on this information.

Census of Population Data

93. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Taoiseach the details of the breakdown of home owner proportion by age band in the past six censuses undertaken by the State. [16807/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): Due to the volume of research and data that is required, we will defer our response and provide the answer directly to the deputy by the 19th April 2017.

Consultancy Contracts Data

94. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-States under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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 provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement. [16991/17]

The Taoiseach: The relevant agency insofar as my Department is concerned is the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The NESC has not hired any private investigation firms in the past five years to date in 2017.

Brexit Issues

95. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; and the anticipated cost. [17009/17]

96. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; and if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit. [17025/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 96 together.

I have restructured my Department to ensure that Brexit is treated as a crucial cross-cutting issue, by creating an amalgamated International, EU and Northern Ireland Division, under a Second Secretary General who also acts as the Government's Sherpa for EU business, including Brexit. The work of this Division includes supporting the Cabinet Committee on Brexit and the Cabinet Committee on European Affairs. There are 31 staff assigned to this Division. Staff in other divisions, notably the Economic Policy Division, also contribute to the work on Brexit.

My Department has also availed of the specialist expertise and knowledge required to respond to the challenges associated with Brexit through the secondment of personnel from semi-State bodies and the private sector to strengthen its capacity in this area.

Costs associated with Brexit were factored into my Department's 2017 Revised Estimate provision which stands at €36.7 million. Resources allocated to Brexit in my Department are kept under ongoing review.

Juvenile Offenders

97. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which support services exist to rehabilitate and educate first-time juvenile offenders with specific reference to the need to ensure that such first-time offenders do not become subject to the influence of recidivists across Ireland and specifically in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16900/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy may be interested in the legal framework applicable to young offenders and the activities and services funded by my Department which support the operation of the law in this area.

Statutory provision in relation to young offenders is set out in the Children Act 2001 (as amended). Accordingly, where a young person under the age of 18 comes into conflict with the law, the principles of the Act apply. A key principle in the Act is that detention should be a last resort. In support of this principle, the legislation facilitates the incremental application of a series of measures, ranging from diversion in the first instance through community based sanctions, to detention.

The first main filter in the youth justice system is the Diversion Programme operated by An Garda Síochána, involving at different stages and depending on the seriousness of the offence, the informal caution (without supervision) and the formal caution (with supervision), including possible involvement with a Garda Youth Diversion Project. The second main filter is the range of non-custodial sanctions available to the courts including court orders for dismissal; conditional discharge; the payment of fines, costs or compensation; the binding over of parents; and orders imposing community sanctions supervised by the Probation Service. In supervising community sanctions, the Probation Service utilises a number of community based organisations with dedicated resources to work with young offenders.

Finally and as a last resort, detention in the Oberstown Children Detention Campus may be used. In this regard, I should mention that my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. Katherine Zappone recently announced the roll-out of a pilot Bail Supervision Scheme for young people which will assist them in complying with their bail conditions pending the hearing of their case. International evidence suggests that this scheme should impact remand trends by offering the court a new option 'bail with supervision' as an alternative to a remand in detention. This alternative option should also help a young person to moderate their chaotic circumstances and promote greater stability.

It will be seen, therefore, that the focus under the law is to adopt a graduated approach which in the main serves to keep the vast majority of young offenders out of the criminal justice system. The Deputy might wish to note that in its 2015 Report, the statutory committee to monitor the effectiveness of the Diversion Programme reported that 74% of children referred to the Diversion Programme were admitted to it, thereby keeping them out of the criminal justice system and away from the potential negative influence of more serious recidivist offenders. The report also highlighted that 71% of children referred to the Programme were referred only once that year.

The operation of the above statutory framework is substantially supported by the significant investment by my Department through the Irish Youth Justice Service in community based programmes which are directed at diverting young people from further involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour. These youth justice community programmes, which are managed by Community Based Organisations, proceed on the basis of evidence that diversion programmes in the form of high quality preventative intervention can do more to reduce crime than more costly custodial sanctions.

In 2017, approximately €21m, inclusive of €4m in Dormant Accounts Fund monies, will be allocated by my Department to Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Young Persons Probation Projects and other community based youth justice initiatives around the country. This substantial investment in community level youth justice projects and activities is managed in partnership with An Garda Síochána and the Probation Service. I might also point out that all 105 Garda Youth Diversion Projects and four of the eighteen Young Persons Probation Projects are part supported by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. The projects attract this EU funding as a social inclusion measure which increases the education and employment opportunities available to young people in addition to diverting them from any further involvement with the criminal justice system.

The purpose of this investment in youth crime intervention work is to engage young people in a process of learning and development that enables them to make positive lifestyle choices. The targeted supports involved seek to provide participants with the life skills that help them to make positive choices and desist from criminal and anti-social behaviour which in turn will enable them to be positive contributors to society. Project activities are wide and varied focusing on the specific risk and needs of young offenders which in the case of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects are assessed upon their referral into a project. Each project develops a tailored suite of interventions to use with each young person based on the risks and needs identified. Examples of activities undertaken across the projects include education and employment related programmes, peer relations programmes, substance abuse programmes, personality and behaviour related programmes with referral to appropriate agencies where required, leisure and recreation programmes, family and parenting related programmes, etc.

As the Deputy is probably aware, the Youth Action Project Sligo (YAPS) Garda Youth Diversion Project serves Sligo Town and its environs. In 2016 the Project's catchment area was extended in the Sligo/Leitrim area. The YAPS Project engages with young people in Leitrim in youth centres based in Manorhamilton and Drumshanbo by way of outreach support. The Monitoring Committee referred to above reported in 2015 that some 153 young people in the Sligo/Leitrim area were referred to the Diversion Programme that year, down 4% on the number of referrals in 2014. Recent information in relation to youth crime in County Sligo and County Leitrim indicates that theft from shops, breach of bail and public order offences are the three most common offences in the catchment area. Nationally, theft and related offences, public order and damage to property were the main categories of offences for which children were referred to the Diversion Programme in 2015. In 2017, my Department through the Irish Youth

Justice Service is providing €116,500 to the YAPS Project.

Money Laundering

98. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she will bring forward the criminal justice (money laundering and terrorism financing) (amendment) Bill on the fourth EU money laundering directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16831/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In December 2016, the Government approved the publication of the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) (Amendment) Bill which will give effect to most of the provisions contained in the 4th EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive (4AMLD), the aim of which is the strengthening of laws in the EU to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The provisions of the 4AMLD are closely modelled on the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body which sets standards and promotes measures for combatting money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Bill will amend the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 which gave effect to the 3rd EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive (3AMLD) and previous FATF recommendations. The 4AMLD builds upon the risk-based approach first provided for in 3AMLD and provides that “designated persons” - such as banks and other bodies - must determine, on the basis of a risk assessment and taking into account relevant factors, the risk of money laundering and terrorist financing posed by a particular transaction, service or customer, and apply customer due diligence measures accordingly. The Bill is currently being drafted.

While the Bill will give effect to the greater part of the Directive, some provisions (i.e., the establishment of registers of beneficial ownership of companies and trusts) are being transposed into Irish law by my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Driver Licences

99. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who wrongfully lost their driving licences as a result of serious discrepancies within the work of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16878/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The specific information sought by the Deputy is not available at present. Insofar as the 14,700 people convicted of road traffic offences in court following the incorrect issuing of a summons are concerned, An Garda Síochána has indicated that it has established a dedicated support helpline for members of the public with queries in relation to their case. An Garda Síochána is also writing to all affected members of the public, explaining what has happened and outlining the solution to rectify the situation. An Garda Síochána has indicated that it has been advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions and Courts Service that these 14,700 cases must be brought back before the Courts at Circuit Court level with a view to requesting that the erroneous convictions can be set aside. An Garda Síochána has established a dedicated team to this end and is liaising with the Court Services to expedite this process. As such, members of the public affected by the road traffic enforcement errors referred to are requested to await the aforementioned correspondence from An Garda Síochána which will provide further clarification on the matter.

I can inform the Deputy that I have written to the Chairperson of the Policing Authority in

accordance with section 62O(6) of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 (as amended) to report to me on its oversight of the issues which have arisen in relation to fixed charge notices and mandatory alcohol testing over the coming period. In particular, I requested that an investigation should be conducted to examine all issues arising, addressing to the extent possible the reasons why the issues have arisen; the incidence and scale of the issues; and the solutions implemented to ensure there is no recurrence. It is expected that the Authority will engage outside expertise to carry out this work.

Motor Insurance

100. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who were overcharged for motor insurance as a result of penalty points on their driving licences due to the serious discrepancies within the work of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16879/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Information of the kind sought by the Deputy is not available, nor is it possible to provide an estimate in this regard.

Insofar as the 14,700 people convicted of road traffic offences in court following the incorrect issuing of a summons are concerned, An Garda Síochána has indicated that it has established a dedicated support helpline for members of the public with queries in relation to their case. An Garda Síochána is also writing to all affected members of the public, explaining what has happened and outlining the solution to rectify the situation. An Garda Síochána has indicated that it has been advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions and Courts Service that these 14,700 cases must be brought back before the Courts at Circuit Court level with a view to requesting that the erroneous convictions can be set aside. An Garda Síochána has established a dedicated team to this end and is liaising with the Court Services to expedite this process. As such, members of the public affected by the road traffic enforcement errors referred to are requested to await the aforementioned correspondence from An Garda Síochána which will provide further clarification on the matter.

I can inform the Deputy that I have written to the Chairperson of the Policing Authority in accordance with section 62O(6) of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 (as amended) to report to me on its oversight of the issues which have arisen in relation to fixed charge notices and mandatory alcohol testing over the coming period. In particular, I requested that an investigation should be conducted to examine all issues arising, addressing to the extent possible the reasons why the issues have arisen; the incidence and scale of the issues; and the solutions implemented to ensure there is no recurrence. It is expected that the Authority will engage outside expertise to carry out this work.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Expenditure

101. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be provided for CCTV cameras in a town (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16880/17]

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.

Crime Levels

102. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of crimes committed by persons while on bail for one or more previous offences here, by county; the number of serious crimes committed by such persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16922/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the publication of recorded crime statistics. To be of assistance I have requested the CSO to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the information requested.

Policing Issues

103. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which policing methods here, and in particular in counties Sligo and Leitrim, are aligned to best practice in other jurisdictions, with particular reference to comparison with those jurisdictions deemed to have the most effective policing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16923/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 contains provisions, the purpose of which are to assist the Garda Síochána to operate to the best standards in line with the police services of other comparable jurisdictions.

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 provided for the establishment of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate. Section 117(1) of the Act requires the Garda Síochána Inspectorate to benchmark their recommendations by reference to the best standards of comparable police services. Arising from this requirement, every inspection conducted by the Garda Inspectorate, and any recommendation arising, has involved examining and taking account of policing practices in other jurisdictions.

The Garda Professional Standards Unit, which was established under Section 24 of the 2005 Act, undertakes reviews, as directed by the Garda Commissioner, into operational, administrative and management matters relating to the Garda Síochána at all levels. Arising from these reviews, the Unit proposes measures to improve performance and promote the highest standards of practice throughout the Garda Síochána with reference to those of comparable police services. The Garda Commissioner, on an ongoing basis, draws on the Unit's proposals to enhance policing practices and policies.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner published her Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 in June 2016. This Programme includes recommendations from the various Garda Inspectorate Reports including the most recent Inspectorate Reports - 'Crime Investigation' and 'Changing Policing in Ireland'.

Key reforms being implemented include the replacement of the current District model of policing with a Divisional model where responsibilities will be allocated on a functional rather

than geographical basis. This will be subject to modifications to ensure the close relationship with communities is maintained in large rural Divisions. In line with international norms, a medium term target of 20% civilians to be achieved by 2021 has been set.

The implementation of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme is primarily a matter for the Commissioner. However, the Government decided that the Policing Authority should be requested, in accordance with section 117(A) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 (as amended), to monitor the implementation of the agreed recommendations in 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and to report to me at regular intervals. I have received the first such progress report from the Policing Authority. Their next progress report is due by the end of April.

In July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána. This Plan marries the agreed recommendations in 'Changing Policing in Ireland' with a major investment programme that will increase the number of gardaí to 15,000; double the number of civilians to 4,000; and more than double the number of reserves members to 2,000. This investment in human capital is supported by a €300 million capital plan that will deliver leading-edge technology and other capital infrastructure to the Garda Síochána. The 2017 Estimates reflect this commitment by providing the resources to recruit 800 gardaí, 500 civilians and 300 reserves in 2017.

Separately, I am advised that the Garda Inspectorate and the Garda Síochána are working towards the production, in tabular form, of a current implementation status report of the recommendations contained in a number of Garda Inspectorate Reports and this report will be published on the Inspectorate's website when it is completed.

The Deputy will be aware that at yesterday's Government meeting I received approval to begin the process of establishing a Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. I expect that the Commission will have regard to best policing practice internationally.

Deportation Orders Data

104. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which appeals in the cases of decisions to deport and subsequent appeals have been successful in each of the past three years to date in 2017 here and in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16926/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The statutory criteria which must be considered in relation to a decision to make a deportation order under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 include national security and public policy, the character and conduct of the person concerned and the common good. In determining whether to make a deportation order, in addition to the factors set out in Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, I must also consider all relevant constitutional and international human rights arising, including those enshrined in the Refugee Convention, the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Charter of Human Rights. The question of not returning a person to a place where certain fundamental rights would be breached (or *non refoulement* as it is commonly referred to) is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order. This involves consideration of whether returning the person would result in the life or freedom of that person being threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whether the person would be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

A deportation order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and

it is only where they fail to do so that the State is forced to remove them and enforce the rule of law.

Revocations can arise through a wide variety of circumstances including, for example, persons the subject of a deportation order who subsequently make an application under EU Treaty Rights or make an application for asylum, having been previously here illegally. The number of successful applications to have deportation orders revoked in accordance with the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 for the past three years to date are contained in the table below. However, statistics in relation to the geographical spread of these applications, as requested by the Deputy, are not maintained.

Deportation Orders Revoked for the period 2014 - 2017	
Year	No. Revoked
2014	334
2015	486
2016	347
2017 (up to 31-03)	29

Cyberbullying Issues

105. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the measures her Department is taking to combat online grooming, cyber blackmailing, cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse directed at children or carried out by children on other children; the details of data on the prevalence of reported cases of these activities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16942/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 was enacted on the 22nd of February 2017. The Act contains provisions which strengthen existing criminal law in combatting child exploitation and, in particular, address the use of modern communication technologies as a tool which may lead to child sexual exploitation.

Section 8 of the Act creates two offences. The first criminalises persons who contact children either online or through mobile communications such as text messaging for the purpose of sexually exploiting the child. This offence is targeted at the initial stages of grooming and does not require physical contact or meeting between the adult and child in question. The offence does not necessarily require that the communication contain a sexual advance or include sexual material as these are not generally features of sophisticated grooming. This offence carries a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment.

Section 8 also includes an offence of sending sexually explicit material to a child. This offence protects children from unwarranted and unwanted advances. There is also recognition that the intention behind this type of activity may be to expose the child to such material with a view to developing the child's familiarity with such material or activity. The penalty for this offence is up to 5 years' imprisonment.

In relation to the broader area of safety online which would include children as well as adults, the Law Reform Commission published its Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety in September 2016. While noting the positive benefits to society of the interconnected digital world in which we live, the report also noted the emerging trend to engage in online communications that cause significant harm to others.

In December 2016, the Government gave its approval for the drafting of a General Scheme of a Bill which would provide for new and amended criminal offences along the lines set out in that report. It is intended that this Bill will address the criminal law aspects of the Law Reform Commission's report. The Commission has proposed extending some existing offences and creating some new criminal offences specific to digital communications. The precise formulation of the offences will be subject to review and potential variation during the drafting of the General Scheme.

While it is not feasible to regulate or monitor the internet in anticipation of all possible incidents such as cyberbullying, if a member of the public becomes aware of activity on the internet which they suspect may be illegal, they can report it confidentially to Hotline.ie which is operated by the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland with oversight by the Office for Internet Safety (OIS) in my Department. Hotline.ie provides the public with the means to report illegal online content, such as child sexual abuse material and liaises with an Garda Síochána, as appropriate, to have illegal content taken down.

An Garda Síochána has an arrangement in place with a large internet service provider to block access to child sexual abuse content in accordance with a list they provide. Among the aims of this initiative is to reduce inadvertent viewing by members of the public, including children, of this illegal material. An Garda Síochána also has a Schools Programme where personal safety issues, including online safety, are highlighted and discussed with children and young people in schools.

In order to assist the public to stay safe on the internet, the OIS in my Department has a series of booklets aimed at parents. The booklets provide information on various aspects of internet safety including filtering, using social networking sites and cyberbullying. The booklet on cyberbullying gives information on such matters as prevention and key advice for children, young people and parents including advice for parents who suspect that their own child may be a cyberbully. These information resources are made available free of charge on the OIS website and also in hard copy on request. The website also contains a wide range of information and links to further resources on internet safety.

With regard to the request for information on the prevalence of reported cases of these activities, I have asked the Garda Authorities for this information and I will furnish it to the Deputy as soon as it is available to me.

Court Accommodation Provision

106. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the annual costs incurred for maintaining the unused courthouse in Wicklow town, including the heating, electricity and security costs, every year since its closure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16943/17]

107. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will reopen the courthouse in Wicklow town and move Wicklow District Court back to Wicklow town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16944/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that because of the general unsuitability of the facilities in Wicklow Courthouse, sittings of the Circuit Court in Wicklow town were transferred to Bray Courthouse in late 2006/early 2007. Subsequently, following receipt of a health and safety report from the Office Public Works in 2010, it was decided that Wicklow Courthouse no longer offered a safe environment for court users or the general public and so all sittings of the courts, including the District Court, transferred to Bray Courthouse from September 2010.

The Courts Service has also informed me that a number of years ago they acquired a site adjacent to Wicklow town courthouse with the objective of refurbishing and extending the existing building. However, the Courts Service has advised that there are no immediate plans to refurbish Wicklow town courthouse.

The Courts Service is completing its current courthouse refurbishment/building programme and I am advised that Wicklow Courthouse will be considered in the context of any forthcoming refurbishment programme, subject to available resources.

In regard to the annual costs incurred, the Courts Service has informed me that the following are the light, heat and fuel costs for 2015 and 2016 in respect of Wicklow Courthouse:

Year	Light, Heat and Fuel Costs
2015	€9,734.36
2016	€3,114.50

The Courts Service has advised that the annual figures from 2010 to 2014 are not immediately available and to provide such costs would involve significant effort involving a manual examination of 4 years of individual invoices to determine the costs based on metre readings specifically for the courthouse.

In relation to security costs, such costs are only available for the years 2012 to 2014 and are as follows:

Year	Security Costs
2012	€1,298.67
2013	€1,798.05
2014	€1,268.22

No specific invoices for security charges for Wicklow Court house were received for 2015 or 2016.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

108. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 60 and 61 of 29 March 2017, if she is satisfied that a company (details supplied) has fulfilled its contractual obligation to provide translation services in a professional manner and in accordance with industry standards in view of concerns that the quality of translation on IPO2 forms is such that it appears to native speakers of those languages that a free online translation service (details supplied) was used to furnish the translation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16963/17]

109. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos 86, 88, 89, and 102 of 23 February 2017 and Parliamentary Question Nos 112 and 113 of 21 February 2017, if her attention has been drawn to the fact that

at points 25 and 26 of the introduction section of the IPO2 form it states that this questionnaire must be returned by the date and time specified in the pre-addressed freepost envelope (details supplied); if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that return by dates were noted on at least some of the cover letters sent out with the questionnaires and on at least some of the questionnaires themselves; and if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there was a strong suggestion that there was in fact a hard deadline for the return of the form, a suggestion that remains on the questionnaire and has not been corrected. [16964/17]

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that IPO2 forms are not available online; and when they will become available online. [16965/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 to 110, inclusive, together.

On the issue of translations, I refer the Deputy to my responses to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 60 to 62 of 29 March, 2017. The position in relation to the provision of translation services is unchanged: the current service provider 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 (IPO).

The Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) who, under the International Protection Act 2015, is independent in the performance of his functions, has further informed me that the quality of all translations provided is kept under constant review, both by the contractor and by the IPO. Any issues raised regarding the quality of translations are immediately addressed as part of this ongoing quality review. As part of this process, the CIPO has advised me that the IPO is engaged with the service provider at present about a number of quality issues in respect of the Application for International Protection Questionnaire. The IPO will be in contact with any applicants who may be impacted, if required, when the quality review has been completed.

On the issue of the return of questionnaires, may I refer the Deputy to my responses to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 86, 88, 89 and 102 of 23 February, 2017. The Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2) is designed to be used by the IPO on an ongoing basis and not just as part of the transition arrangements, therefore the questionnaire does not, and cannot indicate any time-frame for its return. The indicated time-frame for return is detailed with the accompanying documentation.

As I have stated previously, I can inform the Deputy that the information sent to transition applicants in January- February 2017 made clear in Paragraph 7.3 that the IPO 2 Questionnaire should be returned ‘if possible, no later than 20 working days from the date of the covering letter’. The next paragraph 7.4 went on to state clearly that opportunities to add to the information supplied exist up to two weeks, ‘if you are in a position to do so,’ before the scheduled interview in order to ‘*facilitate the translation of documents if required and ensure that the IPO interviewer has all your papers available and considered in advance of the interview date*’. The word deadline or statutory deadline does not appear and no negative consequences for failing to meet an ‘if possible’ time-frame were included or implied. The twenty working day time-frame reflects the willingness of the IPO to begin work on the new single procedure as soon as possible in respect of legacy applications, particularly those in prioritised categories, and a satisfactory number of applicants were in a position to respond promptly, allowing the single application process to commence.

I am happy to restate that this is purely an administrative time-frame and NGOs and service providers have been informed of that throughout the planning process. Flexibility is being provided by the IPO in recognition of the complexity of the process for applicants affected by the

transition provisions and the demands placed on their legal advisors by the transitional arrangements - the wisdom of accessing legal advice is stressed in the Questionnaire. A call centre is available to answer any queries and extra time is available if required for the completion of the IPO 2 Questionnaire. It can be seen therefore that no impediment or disadvantage exists to prevent the careful filling out of the new single application form. I understand, so as to remove any false impressions that may be circulating abroad that the 'if possible' time frame is some sort of statutory deadline, that the IPO has written to the members of the Customer Liaison Panel to confirm the arrangements and that similar clarification has been provided on the IPO website.

The CIPO informs me that adherence to time-frames helps to ensure that the work of the Office continues and that applicants get timely decisions, particularly those in prioritised categories. For those applications which have been made since the commencement of the 2015 Act i.e. on or after 31 December 2016, and are not affected by the complex transition provisions, the IPO is asking those applicants to adhere to the time-frames indicated in their accompanying documentation. However, flexibility continues to be afforded to this group of applicants, if, for example, they are waiting on legal advice.

Applicants have a duty to cooperate as set out in Section 27 of the International Protection Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) and there are consequences for failing to cooperate set out in Section 38, therefore it is entirely appropriate and necessary to include an alert in the Questionnaire. It should also be noted that Section 38 of the 2015 Act, which deals with the consequences of non-cooperation, sets out specifically the procedure to be followed in these cases and gives applicants ample opportunities to address any potential non-cooperation issues.

In relation to the availability of the Questionnaire, under the 2015 Act, applicants are required to apply in person for international protection either at the frontier or within the State. At their time of application and in line with the requirements of the 2015 Act, applicants are fingerprinted, photographed, issued a reference number and a temporary Residence Certificate. Normally at that time, the IPO provides the IPO 2 Questionnaire and an accompanying information pack. In order to maintain the integrity of the Questionnaire and the application process generally, it has never been the practice to make the questionnaire available publicly or online. Such publication would leave the process open to abuse by non-applicants and those who are not at the frontier or within the State as required by law. Additional copies of the Questionnaire are, however, provided to applicants and their legal representatives on request, once their application reference numbers have been assigned.

EU Directives

111. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied as to the effectiveness of the European Communities (Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts) Regulations 1995 as it applies in respect of mortgages between customers and financial institutions; her plans to strengthen these regulations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16975/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that this matter is still being examined by my Department in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General and the matter will be kept under review in terms of any definitive additional obligations arising.

The EU Directive on Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts was given effect in this jurisdiction by Regulations in 1995 and by amending Regulations in 2000, 2013 and 2014. The Directive and Regulations are primarily a matter for the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

These Regulations are enforced by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, ComReg and the Central Bank, the latter having specific responsibility in relation to financial service matters. While these Regulations are enforced by the three aforementioned bodies, it is ultimately a matter for the Courts to determine whether a specific term of a contract is unfair having regard to the features of the contract.

The raising of this issue once again underlines the critical importance of those who are in mortgage arrears and who have been issued with legal proceedings, engaging with their lender and with the court processes. Relevant court processes provide various forms of protection under the Insolvency Acts and the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013. In addition, they will also have the possibility of availing of the free legal and financial advice services provided for under the Government's Abhaile service launched in October 2016.

The latter initiative allows those who are in danger of losing their home to avail of free professional advice, including advice from a Personal Insolvency Practitioner. Under this Scheme, home owners who are in arrears on their home mortgage and at risk of losing their homes are provided with access to free independent expert financial and legal advice and assistance, so that a solution can be put in place that will deal with their debt and keep them in their home, where that is a sustainable option.

The Abhaile service is in addition to the help already available from Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) to homeowners in mortgage arrears. This includes the presence of MABS court mentors at all Circuit Court repossession hearings across the country to provide information and assistance to unrepresented borrowers; and providing in-house dedicated Mortgage Arrears advisers in MABS offices across the country, specifically to assist and negotiate on behalf of borrowers in mortgage arrears.

Consultancy Contracts Data

112. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and-or semi-State bodies under the aegis of her Department in the past five years 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; if she will provide copies of reports submitted to her from these firms as a result of this engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16988/17]

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

Brexit Issues

113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17006/17]

114. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17022/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

The International Policy Division within my Department has been assigned responsibility for coordinating the Department's work as it relates to matters concerning UK withdrawal from the EU. The Division is headed-up by an Assistant Secretary and comprises a team in Dublin and a team based in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels currently consisting of 11 Officers. Arrangements with respect to the assignment of an additional post to the Permanent Representation to support the Brussels based aspects of the forthcoming negotiations are underway.

Complementing this, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) have been selected to make up a cross Divisional working group to focus on the key negotiating issues.

The number of staff assigned to work on Brexit related matters is being kept under review and weekly progress updates are provided to the Department's Management Board on the analysis and preparations underway.

Visa Applications

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a visa will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17039/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Dublin and the decision communicated to the applicant on 22 March 2017. The applicant was advised that an appeal could be submitted within two months of the date of the visa refusal. No appeal has been submitted as yet. If an appeal is to be made, the applicant should bear in mind the refusal reasons set out in the decision and be in a position to fully address them.

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

Criminal Law

116. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will introduce legislation to implement stronger penalties for those who are found to be shoplifting and particularly in cases in which the shop owner or staff are assaulted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17044/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The law relating to theft is contained in the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001. A person guilty of theft is liable to a penalty of a fine or up to ten years' imprisonment or both. The Deputy may also wish to note that the offence of robbery, under section 14 of that Act, is

committed where a person steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, uses force on any person or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force. This offence carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Under section 53 of the Act, where the facts of a case constitute a minor offence, the defendant may be tried summarily if certain conditions are met. In that event, the maximum penalty that may be imposed is 12 months' imprisonment or a class A fine.

A person who commits an assault may also be convicted of an offence under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. The offences in this Act include assault (section 2), carrying a penalty of up to 6 months' imprisonment or a fine or both, assault causing harm (section 3), carrying a penalty of up to 5 years' imprisonment or fine or both and assault causing serious harm (section 4), which carries a penalty of up to life imprisonment or a fine or both.

In determining the sentence to be imposed in any particular case, the trial judge may take into account all the circumstances of the case, including any aggravating or mitigating factors.

Having regard to this, I am satisfied that the penalties which apply in this area are sufficient. While I do not have any plans at present to amend the legislation, I will continue to keep the matter under review.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to previous parliamentary questions and arising therefrom in the case of a person (details supplied), if she will defer the proposal to deport pending a review of the evidence currently en route under separate cover; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17056/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 22 June 2011.

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

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

Legal Costs

118. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the resources available to persons defending themselves in court; her plans to help reduce the standard costs associated with defending oneself such as printing, photocopying of standard forms and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17058/17]

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

Deputy is aware, all standard costs associated with defending oneself in court are borne by the persons defending themselves in court. However, these persons could qualify under the Civil Legal Aid Scheme or the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme should they meet the required criteria.

The provision of civil legal aid in the State is delivered through the Legal Aid Board which administers the Civil Legal Aid Scheme on foot of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 (as amended) and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2016. All applicants for civil legal aid and advice are required to meet a merit test and financial eligibility criteria under section 29 of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2016. The vast majority of applicants granted legal aid and advice are also required to pay some contribution, with some exceptions, such as in regard to defence of District Court child care proceedings and in representation of victims in rape trials. In addition, there are some matters for which there are no financial eligibility criteria, such as legal services provided as part of Abhaile, the Government's Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, to a person who satisfies the criteria for admission to that scheme.

It should also be noted that the Civil Legal Aid Act provides that the Legal Aid Board may waive any contribution payable or accept a lower contribution on the grounds that a failure to do so would cause undue hardship to the applicant. The Legal Aid Board has a policy role in relation to the provision of civil legal aid and periodically brings proposals to my Department in relation to the financial eligibility and other criteria in relation to civil legal aid. I understand that the Legal Aid Board are to consider the criteria in 2017 and I will consider any proposal it may make in due course.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962, which is the primary legislation covering the operation of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, provides that free legal aid may be granted, in certain circumstances, for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. Under the 1962 Act, the courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. My Department is responsible for the payment of fees and expenses to the legal practitioners. I have no function in the day to day operation of the scheme, the assignment of lawyers or the granting of aid which are matters for the court and, as such, are handled by the judiciary.

In regard to standard court fees, I wish to inform the Deputy that fees charged in the courts are set by means of Statutory Instrument. Court fees orders are made by myself as the Minister for Justice and Equality with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Courts Service keeps its fee structure under continuous review in accordance with the power given to it under the Courts Service Act.

Garda Equipment

119. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the costs of breath testing equipment purchased by An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2006 to 2016. [17078/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS) purchase breath testing equipment. The MBRS falls within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross, T.D. To be of assistance, my Department will make arrangements for the MBRS to respond to the Deputy's question directly.

Legal Aid Service Expenditure

120. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of provision of criminal free legal aid and civil free legal aid in County Limerick in each of the years 2009 to 2016 inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17143/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position in relation to payments under the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Criminal Legal Aid Act 1962, as amended, is set out as follows.

Criminal Legal Aid

The Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962, which is the primary legislation covering the operation of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, provides that free legal aid may be granted, in certain circumstances, for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings.

The cost of criminal legal aid provided in respect of cases which were before the Courts in County Limerick in each of the years 2009 to 2016 is as follows:

Year	Amount of Expenditure (€)
2009	2,670,988
2010	2,370,426
2011	2,138,382
2012	1,983,567
2013	1,914,361
2014	2,060,344
2015	1,717,567
2016	2,248,793

Under the 1962 Act, the courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. Under the Constitution, the State is obliged to provide an accused person with the means to obtain appropriate legal representation. Moreover, the European Convention on Human Rights provides that every person charged with a criminal offence is entitled to defend themselves in person or through legal assistance of their own choosing, if they have insufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require.

Civil Legal Aid

The Legal Aid Board, established under the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995 provides civil legal aid and advice to persons of limited means, who cannot afford to pay a solicitor privately. The Legal Aid Board operates 30 full time law centres and a number of part time law centres in Ireland. The Board also provides mediation services in 17 offices around the country to help separating couples to negotiate their own agreement.

It is not possible to extract and isolate the total cost of civil legal aid in any one office/county in a given year as it would be necessary to devise a basis on which to attribute, to each county, all expenditure incurred by the Board centrally. Complexities may also arise at local level with regard to the delivery of civil legal aid; for example a client living in County Limerick may choose to apply to Ennis Law Centre. Also, in a case where two parties to a dispute seek the services of the Board at one law centre, one party will be required to engage with a different law centre, which may be in a neighbouring county.

The majority of the Board's income consists of a grant received from the Department of Justice and Equality. Funding provided by the Government from the year 2009 to 2016 totals almost €264 million, the breakdown of which is shown in the following table. This funding is used to provide the Board's services in all its offices across the country, as well as the support services provided to law centres centrally from the Board's head office.

Year	Amount of Expenditure (€)
2009	€34,640,000
2010	€32,370,000
2011	€30,370,000
2012	€32,922,000
2013	€33,759,000
2014	€32,574,000
2015	€32,471,000
2016	€34,838,000

NAMA Social Housing Provision

121. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for national asset residential property services, NARPS, units leased under the social housing current expenditure programme, SHCEP, after NAMA ceases; his plans for private investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17036/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA has made a significant contribution, on a commercial basis to the delivery of social housing, through working closely with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government and the Housing Agency.

To end 2016, NAMA offered 6,941 vacant houses and apartments owned by debtors and receivers to the Housing Agency, who liaised with the local authorities to determine demand for these properties. Of these, local authorities confirmed demand for 2,748 of these properties. Of these, 2,378 properties have been delivered or contracted for delivery to local authorities and approved housing bodies for use as social housing. It is important to note that NAMA has no role in identifying the suitability of these properties for social housing and has no involvement in the selection of occupants for these properties.

To facilitate the delivery of these residential properties, NAMA established a special purpose vehicle, National Asset Residential Property Services ("NARPS"). The establishment of NARPS has streamlined social housing delivery to local authorities and approved housing bodies both by significantly reducing the up-front capital costs for local authorities in the delivery of these properties for use as social housing and by providing NAMA, the owner of NARPS, with an attractive commercial income stream.

NARPS purchases properties directly from NAMA debtors and receivers, at market value. NARPS then onward leases these properties to local authorities and approved housing bodies on long term (20 year 9 months) leases, which include an option for the local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase the unit at market value towards the end of the lease term.

Of the 2,378 houses and apartments delivered for social housing to end of last year, 1,019 of these were delivered through NARPS and a further 337 properties are contracted for acquisition by NARPS. In 2016, 85% of all units delivered for social housing by NAMA were delivered through NARPS. The NARPs portfolio comprises properties primarily located in Dublin

(43%) and Cork (23%) and comprises 61% apartments and 39% houses.

As I discussed in my response to parliamentary questions 72 and 73 on 10 December 2015, NAMA has a number of potential options regarding its strategy for NARPS in the context of its overarching mandate. Decisions relating to this strategy are a matter for the NAMA Board and I am advised that such matters are actively considered in the context of NAMA's ongoing activities. To my knowledge - and I am assured I and my officials will remain informed - while such issues are actively considered, there are no immediate plans to dispose of NARPS. Furthermore, while under active and ongoing consideration, there are no definitive plans regarding assets which may remain in NAMA when NAMA ceases, not least because the definitive composition of such assets cannot yet be known with certainty.

NARPS is a subsidiary of NAMA and I assume that NAMA will have the opportunity to dispose of its interest in NARPS as part of its ongoing deleveraging. However, it is important to note that regardless of the disposal option that is ultimately determined by the NAMA board, it is envisaged that the existing contractual agreements and long term leases between NARPS and the local authorities and approved housing bodies will remain in place and the rights of each party under those contracts will not be adversely affected.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

122. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Finance if he will allow cystic fibrosis to be listed as a disease whereby those with the condition or their carers avail of the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16890/17]

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

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

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;
- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;
- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required under the Regulations to claim the reliefs provided for in the Scheme. An

unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations.

The criteria to qualify for the Scheme are necessarily precise and specific. After six months a citizen can reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and fuel grant provided for members of the Scheme, the Scheme represented a cost of €65.1 million in 2016. This does not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in the respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

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

Bank Branch Closures

123. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will contact a bank (details supplied) to retain its ATMs at its branches in Arva and Cootehill in County Cavan and if it will consider introducing an ATM in Carrickmacross, which were all announced for closure last week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16896/17]

130. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to enforce the introduction of permanent ATMs in circumstances in which a bank has closed its branch in a small town which has been left with no banking facility and no ATM for withdrawing money; his views on the impact the closure of a bank and ATM has on a town or village; the action he will take to support these towns by way of legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16966/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 130 together.

I should say at the outset that I note with regret that Ulster Bank is closing a significant number of branches with considerable negative impacts on both staff and customers alike.

However, I should stress that the Irish Government has no formal role in the commercial decisions of Ulster Bank, or any other bank, as to their future business model. This is a matter for the Board and Management of a bank itself.

The recent Ulster Bank closures are a response to changing ways of banking due to less use of cash, increased use of technology and corresponding reduced visits to branches. That said, I expect that Ulster Bank will do everything that it can to mitigate the impacts of these branch closures on local communities, including technology and the use of alternative means of service delivery. 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. The Central Bank will also have a role in ensuring that consumer protection rules are followed.

I understand from discussions with officials in Ulster Bank that their current intention is to retain an ATM at Arva and Cootehill, County Cavan, while Carrickmacross, County Monaghan will be served by a Mobile Bank which will operate in that area. In all locations Ulster Bank are committed to working with the local community to ensure a service is maintained.

Finally, 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.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

124. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which first-time buyers' incentives are assisting persons and in particular in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16927/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume that the Deputy's enquiry relates to the Help to Buy scheme (HTB).

Applying to the Revenue Commissioners for the HTB incentive is a two-stage process. Individuals must first submit an application for the incentive to receive an indication of the level of tax relief that may be available to them, and subsequently submit a claim for a tax refund where they have entered into a contract to purchase or have commenced to self build. The refund is generally payable to the contractor at the deposit stage in the case of a home purchase, or in the case of a self-build, is paid to the applicant when they have drawn down the first tranche of their mortgage.

Up to 31 March 2017 there were 4,698 applications made to Revenue in respect of the HTB incentive. Of these, 1,006 have proceeded to the claims stage of the process.

The breakdown of claims by county is as follows:

Counties	Numbers
Carlow	10
Cavan	10
Clare	10
Cork	101
Donegal	14
Dublin	401
Galway	34
Kerry	10
Kildare	120
Kilkenny	10
Laois	11
Leitrim	10
Limerick	32
Longford	10
Louth	12
Mayo	10

Counties	Numbers
Meath	92
Monaghan	10
Offaly	10
Roscommon	10
Sligo	10
Tipperary	10
Waterford	24
Westmeath	17
Wexford	11
Wicklow	66
Total	1,006

I am advised by Revenue that for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality, where there are ten or fewer claims in a particular county, exact figures cannot be provided. Both counties Sligo and Leitrim fall into this category.

The deputy may wish to know that Revenue now regularly publishes statistics in relation to the HTB incentive (including a county-by-county breakdown of claims) on its website at:

www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/tax-expenditures.htm.

Brexit Issues

125. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to counter the likely negative impact of Brexit here in view of the triggering of Article 50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16928/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Department of Finance has been assessing and preparing for the impact of a British exit from the European Union since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016.

The challenges which we face as a result of Brexit are mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning. Work conducted in the Department to assess the potential economic and financial sector implications arising from Brexit, includes a scoping study in November 2015 under the Department of Finance-ESRI joint research programme; an initial short-term economic estimate published in the Summer Economic Statement 2016; an in-depth analysis of the possible sectorial and regional impacts of Brexit arising from Ireland's trade relationship with the UK, published with Budget 2017; and, a joint research paper with the ESRI that modelled the medium to long term macroeconomic impact of Brexit under a number of scenarios, including a WTO relationship. All of these outputs have been made public.

In April 2017, updated macroeconomic forecasts will be published by my Department, as part of the Stability Programme Update.

We know from our own published research that the potential impact on the Irish economy is significant. It is important to recognise that the full impact of the UK's exit is only expected to materialise over time. As we cannot control the international environment, we will need to continue to improve our competitiveness, including by focussing on costs we can control, by

boosting our productivity and ensuring sustainable public finances.

The best and most immediate policy under the Government's control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit is to prudently manage the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland's economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds.

Important steps have already been taken to prepare the economy. In Budget 2017, I confirmed the Government's intention to establish a rainy day fund, to commence in 2019 after Ireland has achieved its Medium Term Objective under the EU's fiscal rules and is running balanced or surplus budgets; I also announced the Government's decision to set a new domestic target of a debt to GDP ratio of 45 percent to be reached by the mid-2020s, or thereafter, depending on economic growth. These decisions will help to ensure that the public finances can withstand negative impacts from Brexit or other economic shocks. Also in Budget 2017, I announced a number of sectorial measures to mitigate Brexit impacts in exposed sectors of the economy.

Officials from my Department are working closely with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to assess the potential impact of Brexit on the SME sector. The Deputy may also wish to note that, aside from the SBCI, there are significant Government measures to support the financing needs of SMEs that are facing challenges (over 170 supports are provided by 30 separate agencies). These measures include the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices and the Credit Review Office. These supports will play an important role in assisting companies and SMEs to meet the challenges of Brexit.

Separately, Minister of State Eoghan Murphy T.D. has responsibility for Financial Services, including the implementation of the International Financial Services (IFS) 2020 Strategy. Important work is ongoing, as part of IFS 2020, to ensure that we maximise opportunities for inward investment arising as a result of Brexit.

We are now at the start of a process within which there is expected to be a number of phases. The Department of Finance contingency work continues to examine all scenarios in relation to Brexit, and will continue to monitor the economic impacts, to carry out relevant analysis and to frame budgetary policy advice in this new context. The work being done by the Department will help to ensure that Ireland will be in a position to respond to the economic challenges arising from Brexit and to ensure that Ireland's interests are protected in the upcoming negotiations at EU level.

Economic Competitiveness

126. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economy remains competitive in view of Brexit and the triggering of Article 50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16929/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Significant progress has been made in recent years in improving Ireland's competitiveness. The latest figures from the Central Bank of Ireland, show that Ireland's real harmonised competitiveness indicator (a widely used measure of competitiveness in Europe) has improved by over 20 per cent between its peak in 2008 and February 2017. This improvement has occurred notwithstanding the substantial appreciation of euro against sterling in the second half of last year, following the UK's vote to leave the EU last June.

The gains in Irish competitiveness since 2008 have been hard-won through productivity improvements and wage and price moderation. It is important that this competitiveness is preserved and continues to support growth. This is all the more important given the risks posed by Brexit.

We must be cognisant that favourable exchange rate movements can reverse, as can be seen for example in the strengthening of the euro against sterling last year. Similarly, gains from the fall in oil prices may unwind in the future. Indeed, the drag on consumer prices from low oil prices is already beginning to ease. In addition, excessive rent and house price growth are also a potential threat to competitiveness.

These risks highlight the importance of maintaining competitiveness oriented policies, including sustainable fiscal policies, to help address emerging uncertainties. It is also important that at firm level, pay moves in line with productivity developments.

Mortgage Lending

127. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his understanding of the term first-time buyer in the context of the Central Bank's macro prudential rules, the help-to-buy scheme and other schemes in which this term is used; if this is an identical term in all cases; if not, the differences in the terms used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16953/17]

128. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if, under the Central Bank's mortgage rules, persons seeking to buy a home with a partner are still classified as non-first time buyers if they have, for example, previously added their name to a mortgage on their parents' home for a short period,; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16954/17]

129. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if a mechanism exists whereby a person deemed not to be a first-time buyer can present a case as to why his or her specific circumstances are exceptional in the context of the Central Bank's mortgage rules and the help to buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16955/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 129, inclusive, together.

The statutory framework for the Central Bank of Ireland macro-prudential rules on residential mortgage lending is Regulations made under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013. In this context, S.I. No. 47/2015 (the statutory instrument which implements the mortgage measures) provides that a "first-time buyer" means, "subject to paragraph (2), a borrower to whom no housing loan has ever before been advanced"; (paragraph 2 subsequently provides that where the borrower under a housing loan is more than one person and a housing loan has previously been advanced to any one of those persons, none of those persons is a first-time buyer).

On the Revenue aspect, there are two schemes in the Taxes Consolidation Acts 1997 which provide assistance for first-time purchasers. Section 266A provides for a repayment of DIRT to first-time purchasers and was introduced by the 2014 Finance Act. Section 477C is the new Help-to-Buy scheme that was introduced by the 2016 Finance Act. For the purposes of these provisions, a first-time purchaser is an individual who has not, either individually or jointly with any other person or persons, previously purchased or previously built, directly or indirectly, on his or her own behalf a dwelling.

It is a matter of fact whether an individual meets the requirements as a "first-time buyer"

or “first-time purchaser” under the two different statutory frameworks. Where the position is unclear, for example where a person has their name added to a mortgage, the individual should provide full details to their proposed lender or to the Revenue Commissioners as appropriate so that they may consider the position and assist the individual.

Under the Help-to-Buy Scheme, an individual who is aggrieved by a decision made by the Revenue Commissioners to refuse a claim may appeal that decision to the Appeal Commissioners within 30 days of the notice of the decision. Likewise, if an individual is unhappy with a decision made by a regulated financial service provider, the errors and complaints resolution provisions of the Consumer Protection Code will be available, and if necessary a complaint can be submitted to the independent Financial Services Ombudsman.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 123.

Consultancy Contracts Data

131. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and/or semi-State agencies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of this engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16984/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to advise the Deputy that of the 18 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 15 have indicated that they have not engaged the services of private investigation firms in the past five years to date in 2017. In relation to the 3 remaining bodies under the aegis of my Department, the Investor Compensation Company Limited and the National Treasury Management Agency* have provided the information sought in respect the services of private investigation companies engaged by them, with details set out in the table below. It was not possible for the Central Bank to provide the information sought in the time available and therefore I will make arrangements to provide the outstanding information in line with Standing Orders.

* The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) is designated as the State Claims Agency (SCA) when performing the claims management and risk management functions designated to it under the National Treasury Management Agency Act 1990, as amended. When deemed necessary, in the course of its work and activities, the SCA engages the services of private investigation firms. The material provided by the SCA covers the amounts paid during the period in question.

Body	Number of private investigation firms	Names of firms and amounts paid	Report on completion
Investor Compensation Company Limited	1	Global Investigations Limited 2015: €370	No

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Number of private investigation firms	Names of firms and amounts paid	Report on completion
NTMA*	34	Abbey Investigations Ltd2012: €4,7582013: €6,8462014: €8,4592015: €23,6942016: €20,0172017: €3,140	No
		ABC Investigations Ltd2012: €3962013: €3,691	No
		Absolute Partnership Ltd.2014: €1,847	No
		Aquila Consultancy Ltd2012: €1,8562013: €1,477	No
		Axis Investigations2012: €8012013: €9,6742014: €6,8552015: €10,5852016: €20,3622017: €6,944	No
		Brosnan Investigations Ltd2013: €3592015: €1,1212016: €2,9402017: €1,439	No
		Canpro King-Reed LP2012: €4,742	No
		Capital Investigation Agency2015: €2,614	No
		Celtic Investigations2012: €5,2312013: €3,2592014: €2,5952015: €4,2532016: €181	No
		Confidential Investigations Athlone2012: €4,7982013: €8,2442014: €9,4552015: €2,6142016: €7,327	No
		Eamonn Gavin Investigations2015: €923	No

Body	Number of private investigation firms	Names of firms and amounts paid	Report on completion
		Edward Moore & Co2012: €12,9202013: €7822014: €2,6892015: €4,9222016: €2,496	No
		Enterprise Investigations2012: €1,5842013: €4,9792014: €3,0552015: €1,471	No
		Fleming Morris & Associates Ltd2015: €1,196	No
		Foley Detective & Security Agency Ltd2012: €2,1002013: €1,3132014: €1,3522015: €6072016: €3,675	No
		G T Investigations Ltd2013: €2,3102014: €4,208	No
		G4S Compliance and Investigation2016: €5,0932017: €2,331	No
		G4S Integrated Services2013: €185	No
		Hugh Coyle & Associates2014: €325	No
		ID Investigations2015: €11,2642016: €10,5762017: €4,505	No
		IE Investigations2012 €18,1922013: €29,4202014: €31,9092015: €11,703	No

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Number of private investigation firms	Names of firms and amounts paid	Report on completion
		Insurance & General Investigation Service 2012: €21,439 2013: €20,199 2014: €19,550 2015: €12,756 2016: €16,634 2017: €1,584	No
		International Bureau of Intelligence 2012: €5,126 2013: €23,112 2014: €29,528 2015: 7,638 2016: €2,886	No
		International Intelligence Surveillance 2012: €4,890	No
		James Crowley & Associates 2012: €11,850 2013: €21,352 2014: €18,438 2015: €16,749 2016: €5,070	No
		KellKee Services 2014: €460 2015: €663 2016: €1,378	No
		Knight Investigations Ltd. 2012: €3,051 2013: €4,040 2014: €2,959 2015: €3,070 2016: €11,524 2017: €1,714	No
		Naughton Consultancy Services 2012: €11,956 2013: €2,257 2014: €1,175 2015: €2,098	No
		Premier Insurance & Legal Services Ltd 2012: €16,932 2013: €17,472 2014: €21,439 2015: €7,815 2016: €16,070 2017: €12,929	No

Body	Number of private investigation firms	Names of firms and amounts paid	Report on completion
		Profile Investigations 2012: €9,038 2013: €2,229 2014: €2,312 2015: €3,100 2016: €2,812	No
		PROTOCOL Security Services 2012: €2,316 2013: €10,605 2014: €6,682 2015: €7,606 2016: €26,584 2017: €5,982	No
		Ryan Corporate Investigations Ltd. 2012: €2,755 2014: €4,662 2015: €1,273 2016: €1,169	No
		Solutions 2013: €2,814 2014: €6,876 2015: €3,545 2016: €968 2017: €1,812	No
		Southern Investigation Services Ltd. 2012: €15,684 2013: €10,621 2014: €16,306 2015: €8,226 2016: €27,436 2017: €4,911	No

Brexit Issues

132. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17002/17]

133. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17018/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

The Assistant Secretary who heads the EU and International Division of my Department has

been designated as the lead official in the Department for Brexit matters. A dedicated Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate Brexit work across the entire Department and to act as a key liaison point, in particular with the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are currently four staff in the dedicated unit which is led at Principal Officer level. Also, an additional staff member has been assigned to the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels specifically to deal with Brexit.

We have appointed lead Brexit coordinators at Principal Officer level across all divisions of the Department. The challenges which we face as a result of Brexit are mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning.

Brexit resourcing has been managed within existing the paybill allocation. We will continue to monitor the resources needed to respond to specific policy challenges on an ongoing basis.

Credit Unions

134. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for the 2015 decision to restrict credit unions from holding over €100,000 in savings on behalf of members; if he is satisfied that this requirement does not violate competition law in the banking sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17053/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My role as Minister for Finance is to ensure that the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions.

Credit unions are regulated and supervised by the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank who is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within her independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability and to protect the savings of credit union members.

While it is important to distinguish this division of roles, it is equally important to recognise that both the Registrar of Credit Unions and I, as Minister for Finance, are working together for the safety of members' savings and the security of the credit union sector.

The Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016 (the Regulations) came into effect on 1 January 2016 following commencement of the remaining sections of the Credit Unions and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 which provided regulation making powers to the Central Bank. These Regulations set out an individual member savings limit of €100,000. The Regulations introduced on 1 January 2016 also provided that credit unions could apply to the Central Bank to retain individual members' savings in excess of €100,000, which were held at commencement of the Regulations and that Credit unions with total assets in excess of €100m could apply to the Central Bank for approval to increase individual member savings in excess of €100,000.

The Central Bank have informed me that it is their duty to ensure that actions taken represent the best overall outcome, from the perspective of ensuring the protection of members' funds by credit unions and safeguarding the stability of the sector. A maximum individual member's savings limit of €100,000 ensures the protection of members' savings and continue to ensure that credit unions' funding is sufficiently diversified and is not dependent on a small number of members. This cap is based on the savings amount protected under the Deposit Guarantee Scheme and would therefore ensure that no member of a credit union would lose any of their savings in the event of a resolution. It is aimed at protecting members' savings and also at

protecting the financial stability of the sector, given the wider potential negative impact on the sector of any credit union member losing some of their savings.

The Central Bank have further informed me that in relation to concerns raised regarding competition, they have been provided with specific regulation making powers by the Oireachtas in relation to credit unions. Where the Central Bank regulates one category of regulated entity by imposing specific regulatory requirements which may be different to those imposed on other categories of regulated entities, this simply reflects the nature of the distinct categories of entities involved. As in other areas of the regulatory framework, this limit takes account of the nature, scale and complexity of credit unions and is considered appropriate by the Central Bank at this time given the current credit union business model.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has responsibility for enforcing Irish and EU competition law. More information on their role in this regard is available on their website, www.ccpc.ie.

International Summits

135. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his policy on attendance at and participation in the OECD's annual international summit on the teaching profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16836/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The International Summit on the Teaching Profession is just one of a number of initiatives that are organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in the area of education policy. The Summit on the Teaching Profession is organised by the OECD in conjunction with a number of partners, including Education International, the international organisation of teachers' unions.

My Department engages strongly with officials and researchers at the OECD in the field of education. Ireland is a participant in the OECD's PISA study and has also contributed to or participated in other research projects. OECD officials are invited to visit my Department to discuss specific issues, and I value the learning opportunities that these visits provide.

I have not made any policy decision regarding participation in the International Summit on the Teaching Profession. In 2017, pressures of other business made it impracticable for me to attend the International Summit on the Teaching Profession. However I would positively consider my future attendance at future summits.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

136. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of his Department's work on setting up a relocation panel for permanent primary school teachers who need to relocate but do not wish to resign from their posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16837/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The provisions of the teacher exchange scheme are set out by my Department in Circular Letter 0017/2015 the contents of which were agreed under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council. The Teacher Conciliation Council is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for Teachers and was set up to deal with claims and proposals relating to the Terms and Conditions of employment of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of teachers, school management, the

Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Teacher Exchange scheme is open to primary teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council, have completed probation and who wish to exchange their posts for educational purposes. Educational purposes would include enabling teachers in primary schools to gain experience of teaching in different types of settings. The concept is that teachers will gain a different experience, enrich their knowledge and understanding of their professional work and share this understanding with colleagues.

The minimum period for which an exchange may occur is one year and the maximum is five years.

In 2016 the issue of this limit and the purpose of the scheme was reviewed under the auspices of Teachers Conciliation Council. Having considered the matter and taking into account all circumstances both the union and management partners considered that their preferred option is to retain the existing scheme as set out in the published circular.

However, in response to a request for consideration of a voluntary transfer scheme for Primary Teachers from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, I have decided to extend the maximum period for which an exchange may occur for one further year.

This new voluntary transfer scheme is to be considered under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council.

English Language Training Organisations

137. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of each Accreditation and Co-ordination of English Language Services, ACELS, and a company's (details supplied) schools capacity that is left empty in order to assure they have enough capacity to honour the ACELS and the company's learner protection scheme should the need arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16838/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): ACELS (the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services) is a voluntary national scheme responsible for the development and management of the recognition and inspection of English language schools. ACELS is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). My Department does not maintain figures of the occupancy rates within privately operated English language schools.

As part of the regulations governing the operation of ACELS, all schools with ACELS recognition must have learner protection schemes in place. These schemes are underpinned by Statutory Declarations given by the providers.

The company referred to by the Deputy is a long established private association of English language schools. It is a condition of membership of this company that a school holds ACELS recognition.

The company's learner protection scheme requires its members to provide a guarantee that students enrolled in its schools will be able to complete the course for which they have enrolled, or a similar course, at another member school in the locality.

Proposed Legislation

139. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 in particular his Department's engagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, regarding the implementation schedule for the International Education Mark, IEM, and their recruitment of inspectors for the IEM; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16840/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM). These amendments will be contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill.

The Heads of this Bill are currently being prepared by my Department in consultation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and will be brought to Government for approval shortly. It is anticipated that the IEM will be introduced in 2018.

Apprenticeship Data

140. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the uptake in the number of apprenticeships by females; his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16841/17]

173. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the uptake in the number of apprenticeships by females; his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16875/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 173 together.

The number of females employed in craft apprenticeships has been low as these programmes operate in sectors that have traditionally low levels of female employment. While SOLAS offers a bursary to employers to encourage them to employ female apprentices, the number remains low.

Currently the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. The first of these new apprenticeships were launched in 2016, with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship getting underway in November. We have already seen an increase in female participation in these new programmes with almost 40% of the initial intake on the Insurance Practitioner programme being female. With further new apprenticeships getting underway in 2017, many of which are in sectors where there is a different gender balance in the workplace, it is expected, as these new apprenticeships are rolled out, that this will lead to a continued increase in female participation.

The Department of Education and Skills, in conjunction with SOLAS, will review the pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of diverse groups, including female participation, in light of the broadening of the apprenticeship system into new areas. The review will be completed in 2018 and any recommendations made will be implemented immediately. A promotion campaign around opportunities for learners and employers in apprenticeship is getting underway. This campaign will have a particular focus on encouraging women to engage in apprenticeship programmes.

School Patronage

141. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in the Government reaching its target of 400 non-denominational and multid denominational schools by 2030; the number of such schools to be opened in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16842/17]

161. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location of all schools under religious patronage which he expects to be divested in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16863/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 161 together.

I presume the Deputy meant to refer to 2017 in her Question No. 161 (Ref. No. 16863/17).

The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty-first Century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

The Deputy will be aware that on the 30th January, 2017, I announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area.

This will involve the Education and Training Boards in the initial phase, as the State's local education authorities, identifying areas where there is likely to be demand for greater diversity and they will work with pre-school services to establish evidence of this demand among the cohort of pre-school parents. There will then be discussions between individual ETBs and the existing patrons/landowners concerning the possible transfer of schools to accommodate this demonstrated demand for diversity.

Each ETB will then prepare a report for the Department outlining the levels of demand within their functional areas and the responses of the existing patrons as to how this might be accommodated through the reconfiguration of existing school provision. The location of these schools is therefore unlikely to become available until after the reports have been submitted.

In the subsequent implementation phase, where the level of demand for multid denominational schools is sufficient to justify transfer of a school from denominational to multi-denominational patronage, a process will commence to give effect to that. There will be a role for the existing patron/landowner in consulting with local community and school interests and taking into account proposals from different prospective multi-denominational patrons. It is envisaged that transfers will largely be by way of voluntary transfer of live schools by existing patrons.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, in 2017 and beyond.

In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established

in areas of demographic growth.

Special Educational Needs Data

142. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way under the new model for allocation of resource teaching hours in primary and secondary schools children who received diagnoses in the school year 2016-2017 will receive resource teaching hours from September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16843/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year. No allocation made for such pupils by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.

An additional 900 teaching posts have been provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model. The provision of an additional 900 teaching posts is a very significant investment in the provision of additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs in our schools. This is additional to an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers allocated to schools annually by the NCSE since 2011.

The additional funding will provide additional supports to over 1,000 schools who are identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model. Supports for children with special educational needs is a key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, who require such support.

Under the new allocation model, schools will be provided with a total allocation which includes a baseline allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school's profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

Schools will be frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

The new allocations to schools will include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

All allocations to schools include a supplementary provision, which has been referred to as the 'baseline allocation' which is allocated over and above the profiled allocation.

For students who start school from September 2017, with a specific diagnosis, either in junior infants or transferring from another school, the resources they need will already be in the school under the new model.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the existing model. By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria, it is expected that generally, a school's profile will remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

The NCSE has published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie.

Schools were asked to submit appeals by March 31st 2017. The appeal process will consider whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

DES Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the basis on which the Education Research Centre determined the allocations for all schools.

The model will allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. The National Council for Special Education will support schools in managing their special education teaching allocations in the first instance. Only in very exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the schools profile has changed very significantly since the allocation was made to the school, may an additional allocation of hours be made to the school.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are also being prepared and will be published shortly.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

Digital Strategy for Schools

143. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of information technology grants his Department has paid to primary and secondary schools over the past 12 months; the details of the grants provided to schools, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16844/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, sets out the Department's vision for embedding ICT in teaching learning and assessment in primary and post-primary schools. The Strategy recognises the issues schools face in relation to ICT infrastructure, and funding of €210m is committed to address these requirements over the period of the Strategy. The first tranche of funding of €30m in respect of the 2016-2017 school year has been issued to all eligible primary and post-primary schools. Details of the Grant Scheme for ICT Infrastructure, including eligibility criteria and the methodology applied to calculating the payments, can be found on the Department's website at www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001_2017.pdf.

The rates payable are €2,000 per school plus €22.20 per mainstream pupil in primary schools, with additional per capita payments for pupils in DEIS schools, Special Classes and Special Schools. At post-primary, the rates payable are €2,000 per school plus €31.90 per student, with an additional per capita payment for students in DEIS schools. The grant is worth approximately €4,000 for a 100 pupil school and approximately €13,000 (plus the lump sum) for a 500 pupil school at primary level. At post-primary level, the grant is worth circa €17,000 for a 500 student school, and some €33,000 for a 1,000 student school.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to this funding is being compiled currently in tabular form and will be issued to the Deputy as soon as possible.

In addition, all new school buildings, and school extensions projects (where additional classroom accommodation is being delivered) receive an ICT Infrastructure grant per classroom, issued by the Planning and Building Unit of this Department.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers employed prior to 2007 that have registered for retrospective Garda vetting under the terms of the National Vetting Act and Teaching Council Acts; the outstanding number of applications to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16845/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On the 1 January 2017, there were approximately 32,500 teachers on the Teaching Council's Register of Teachers who had not been previously garda vetted by the Council. This cohort of teachers were typically permanent teachers who have been in the same school since prior to the introduction of vetting in 2006.

The Teaching Council Amendment Act 2015 Act has, inter alia, provided for the retrospective vetting of registered teachers to be carried out by the Teaching Council in the context of annual renewal of teacher registration. In November 2016, I commenced the relevant provisions of the 2015 Act which provide for the Council to commence the task of retrospectively vetting the cohort of teachers who have never before been vetted.

The Teaching Council commenced this work in January of this year and to date has requested approximately 6,700 teachers to apply for retrospective vetting in the context of their annual renewal of registration. It is intended that the remaining cohort of circa 25,800 teachers will be requested to apply for vetting on a phased basis during the remainder of 2017.

School Staff

145. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the model of leadership in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16846/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

146. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide primary and post-primary average class size figures for Ireland and for other EU member states; his plans to tackle large class size concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16847/17]

162. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider further improvements in the pupil-teacher ratio to help reduce the class size towards EU average in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16864/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 162 together.

Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by 1 point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year and it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

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

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

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

Commencement of Legislation

147. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are remaining sections of the Teaching Council Act to be commenced; the timeframe for commencing such sections; and the number of fitness to teach complaints received and processed to date since he commenced these provisions in July 2016. [16848/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The only remaining section of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 to be commenced is Section 39, which deals with continuing education and training and professional development of teachers. I am advised by the Teaching Council that Cosán, the national framework for teacher's learning (CPD) has entered a development phase which is due to conclude in 2020. This will then pave the way for the commencement of this section of the Act.

I commenced the sections of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 relating to fitness to teach in July 2016. The Deputy will appreciate that the fitness to teach process is inde-

pendent of my Department and she should contact the Council directly for information on the number of complaints received.

The Deputy should note that, under Section 55 of the Teaching Council Act, the Council must submit the annual report of its activities and proceedings to me as Minister. Fitness to teach was commenced on 25 July 2016, during the last reporting year which ended 28 March 2017. I look forward to the next annual report which will be due later this year. These reports are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Student Support Schemes

148. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific measures he plans to deal with concerns regarding third level student support and funding challenges for third level institutions. [16849/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2017, my Department will invest almost €450m in access measures to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education.

This will benefit approximately 80,000 disadvantaged students through the student grant scheme. Other measures include the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

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

While the Cassells report deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education, we also have to consider the immediate challenges. In that context, I am pleased to have secured additional funding for the sector, in Budget 2017, for the first time in nine years. An additional €36.5m has been made available in 2017 as part of a €160m three year funding package. This includes €8.5m for access measures, including the reintroduction of postgraduate maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged students. This additional money will allow the sector keep pace with demographic increases and introduce targeted initiatives in areas such as disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning. Among those who will benefit from the additional third level funding being made available are students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lone parents, and Travellers.

In addition, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently undertaking a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. It is estimated that the mechanism, which proposes an increase in the National Training Fund levy from 0.7% to 1% between 2018 and 2020, could yield close to an additional €200m revenue in 2020. Comments on the proposal may be submitted to either Department by 5 p.m. on Thursday 13th April 2017. Full details of the consultation process are available on the websites of both Departments.

The intention is that, taken together, these approaches will contribute to and inform the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the higher education and further education and training sectors.

Teachers' Remuneration

149. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there is a clear pay disparity between teachers recruited before 1 January 2011 and those recruited thereafter; his further views on whether it is unacceptable to maintain such pay disparities; his plans to address pay equality issues beyond the steps already agreed on restoration of a qualification allowance payment; the cost of restoring teachers recruited since 1 January 2011 to the previous pay scale; the elements which make up this cost; and the number of teachers affected. [16850/17]

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

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

I accept that ASTI members had outstanding pay demands and that the deal did not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it has restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and delivers full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced services for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for higher education and for apprenticeships. The door remains open to the trade union movement seeking to advance this issue further in the context of future public service pay talks.

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

Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute.

The proposals provided ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration I mentioned above, including the agreement reached with TUI and INTO, which will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

In addition, there were other immediate undoubted benefits for individual ASTI members in accepting the proposals including:

- Avoiding an increment freeze
- Inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale
- Continued alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions

- The Ward Report measures and a revised sequence for filling posts which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before
- An increase in the quantum of the Croke Park hours that can be worked on other than a whole-school basis
- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours
- Protection against compulsory redundancy
- The €1,000 increase now being paid to public servants on 1 April 2017, brought forward from 1 September 2017 under the LRA.

ASTI members have voted to reject the proposals put forward aimed at resolving their dispute and in consequence, to reject the Lansdowne Road Agreement. It is regrettable that many ASTI members will now suffer permanent financial losses and loss of other benefits as a result of this choice.

The proposals represented the final outcome of the process and there will be no further offer made to ASTI. The Government is committed to continuing to work with unions inside the agreement in progressing consideration of pay and conditions issues. The work of the Public Service Pay Commission is now underway in this regard.

Croke Park Agreement Issues

150. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to issue a directive on implementing pay deductions for members of teachers' unions that rejected working additional hours under the Croke Park agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16851/17]

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

A number of measures are being applied since July 2016 or will be applied to ASTI members in consequence:

- The pay increases for 2012 new entrant teachers that are effective from 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018 do not apply;
- Increments are frozen until July 2018;
- Missing out on inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale - the first moiety of this due on 1 September 2016 (€796) has not been paid;
- The alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners has been withdrawn, meaning a further pay reduction of up to €1,769 per teacher;
- Non-application of the €1,000 increase being paid to public servants on 1 April 2017, as brought forward from 1 September 2017 under the LRA;
- The Ward Report measures have been withdrawn and the revised sequence for filling posts

is not being applied – both of these would enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before;

- Promotion posts announced in Budget 2017 will not be available;
- The additional teacher allocation/ reduction in class contact time from September 2017 for teachers with Junior Cycle classes will not apply;
- No S&S opt-out option;
- No S&S opt-in option;
- Missing out on chance to influence use of Croke Park hours through a review;
- Potential for job losses through compulsory redundancy;
- Withdrawal of enhanced redundancy payment where a teacher is made redundant;
- Potential delay or loss of the pay increase of €1,000 due on 1 September 2017 and the reversal of the pay reductions for higher earners due on 1 April 2017.

Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute. ASTI members have chosen to reject the proposals put forward aimed at resolving their dispute and in consequence, to reject the Lansdowne Road Agreement. It is regrettable that many ASTI members will now suffer permanent financial losses and loss of other benefits as a result of this choice.

The proposals represented the final outcome of the process and there will be no further offer made to ASTI. The Government is committed to continuing to work with unions inside the agreement in progressing consideration of pay and conditions issues. The work of the Public Service Pay Commission is now underway in this regard.

Junior Cycle Reform

151. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status on the roll-out of the junior cycle reform process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16852/17]

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

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

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

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

Skills Shortages

152. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the areas that have been highlighted as having skills shortages by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (details supplied); his plans to tackle these skills shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16853/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The work of the SLMRU has been invaluable in identifying the existing and future skills needs of a number of sectors of the Irish economy including sectors such as IT, manufacturing, engineering, sales and the green economy.

The outputs from the SLMRU have supported and will continue to support the development of a number of strategies that have been implemented to address these skills needs in the various sectors. These strategies include the ongoing SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy, the National Skills Strategy 2025, and The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

The data from the SLMRU will also feed in to the work of the soon to be established National Skills Council. By using robust skills data from sources such as the SLMRU, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Regional Skills Fora, the Council will oversee research and provide advice on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and how to secure the delivery of identified needs across the Irish economy.

Child Care Services Provision

153. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the suggestions by an organisation (details supplied) that related capital investment will be necessary if the programme for Government commitment on having schools available for childcare services can be successfully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16854/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In accordance with key commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016) in relation to encouraging the use of school buildings outside school hours, my Department is working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in considering how to facilitate schools who wish to make their facilities available as part of the range of options available to parents where there is demand.

Draft guidelines on the use of school buildings out of hours are currently being prepared and will be made available further to consultation with relevant school authorities and trustees.

In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of school facilities must be approved by the school authority.

In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community,

education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.

The provision of childcare services is a matter for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. An interdepartmental group with senior officials from both my Department and from DCYA finalised an Action Plan for School age Childcare which was published in early March 2017. Implementation of the Action Plan is now underway to develop an appropriate quality and standards framework and the development of a capital scheme to be funded by DCYA in 2017, which will provide small grants for childcare services. My Department is in discussions with QQI in relation to other actions. The Action Plan is available on <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-School-Age-Childcare.pdf>.

Education Policy

154. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to progress the three areas (details supplied) in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus in the sector; the reason he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16855/17]

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

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
4. Build stronger bridges between education and wider community
5. Improve national planning and support services

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

Our approach to special education has undergone a huge transformation with a growing proportion of children with special educational needs being educated with their peers in mainstream schools. The participation and progress of learners with special educational needs across the whole education system remains a key focus with an emphasis on improving whole-school and whole system approaches. The Action Plan 2017 sets out a range of measures which will

be undertaken during this year. These include allocating teachers to schools under the new allocation model to support children with special educational needs, publishing the outcomes of a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, and consult with partners on the implementation of sections of the EPSEN Act and on the provision of services to children with Down Syndrome.

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

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

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

DEIS Scheme

155. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage at which the review of the school support programme through the DEIS initiative is at; when this review will be completed and published; if he envisages any changes to the funding or delivery model of the DEIS programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16856/17]

157. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new national action plan for education inclusion will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16858/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 157 together.

I refer to my response of 1 March 2017, when I informed the Deputy that the review of DEIS has been completed and the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion entitled 'DEIS Plan 2017' was published, together with a report of the review, on 13 February 2017.

A copy of both reports, 'Report of the Review of DEIS' and 'DEIS Plan 2017' are available on my Department's website - <http://www.education.ie>.

School Curriculum

156. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide new courses in the leaving certificate, such as coding, physical education and politics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16857/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has committed to enriching teaching and learning with new curricula, in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019. This will contribute to delivering a step-change in the development of critical skills, knowledge and competences and providing the foundations for participation in work and society.

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

The Government is committed to enhancing the availability of technology in schools through the introduction of ICT/Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject. As set out in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is conducting a scoping exercise in this regard. Informed by this research, the NCCA are working on development of a draft subject specification in 2017, with a view to implementation in schools in September 2018.

Physical Education has been developed by the NCCA as a full subject that can be assessed for the Leaving Certificate in a manner similar to other subjects. I have approved a Senior Cycle Framework for PE - non-examinable, and a Leaving Certificate PE specification - an examinable subject for Leaving Certificate.

The Framework will assist schools to design a P.E. programme for those students who may not choose to take P.E. as part of their Leaving Certificate examination. These developments are in keeping with the strong emphasis from my Department on promoting and encouraging Healthy Lifestyles for all students and commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government.

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

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 155.

School Staff

158. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the moratorium on filling certain promoted posts in schools will be lifted, since it was introduced as an emergency measure in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16859/17]

168. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end the current ban on promotions at the primary school level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16870/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 168 together.

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

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

Budget 2017 also provides for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts in both the primary and post-primary sector with effect from the 2017/18 school year.

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

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

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

Teachers’ Professional Development

159. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the ways, and total investment involved, in which his Department supports teacher continuous professional development at primary and post primary levels; the percentage this is of education spending overall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16860/17]

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

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

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

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

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

Other areas of expenditure include training for child protection, Board of Management training, a Teacher Fee Refund Scheme, Teacher Professional Networks and a number of post-graduate programmes to meet particular identified needs such as the teaching of mathematics and special educational needs.

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

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

160. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated time-frame for and cost of the Government programme commitment to reducing the pupil-teacher ratio in junior and senior infants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16862/17]

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

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

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

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

The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-

primary schools in the next school year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demographic need, curriculum reform, additional resource teaching posts and the strengthening of school leadership.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 141.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 146.

Student Grant Scheme

163. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the restoration of postgraduate grants and their necessity to open up access to postgraduate studies and to ensure that a steady stream of persons achieve a postgraduate qualification for societal good and to ensure attractiveness to foreign investors. [16865/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware of the Action Plan for Education commitment to increase financial supports for postgraduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households.

In response to this commitment, I secured additional funding of €4 million in Budget 2017 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. This will benefit approximately 1,100 post graduate students who meet the eligibility criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant.

The Student Grant Scheme is now open for applications for the 2017/18 academic year. This earlier opening date will facilitate earlier decisions for students on their grant applications and therefore provide students with greater certainty about the financial support that will be available to them.

In addition to this specific measure targeted at postgraduate students, I also secured an additional €4.5 million in Budget 2017 for other new access measures that will benefit target groups such as lone parents, travellers, mature students, and students with disabilities.

The new measures being introduced as a result of Budget 2017 will complement the existing student supports that are already in place. In total my Department will invest approximately €450 million in access supports in the 2017/18 academic year. This will benefit approximately 80,000 disadvantaged students through the student grant scheme. Other measures include the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

Teachers' Remuneration

164. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for equating newly qualified teachers since 2011 and those that entered the workforce before; if he will report on discussions with an organisation (details supplied) on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16866/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so

as to stabilise the country's public finances. These included pay reductions and also reductions to the pay of new entrant public servants, including teachers, since 2011. Collective agreements reached between the Government and the public service unions provided vital industrial peace during this very difficult period for the State.

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

I accept that ASTI members had outstanding pay demands and that the deal did not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it has restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and delivers full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced services for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for higher education and for apprenticeships. The door remains open to the trade union movement seeking to advance this issue further in the context of future public service pay talks.

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

Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute.

The proposals provided ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration I mentioned above, including the agreement reached with TUI and INTO, which will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

In addition, there were other immediate undoubted benefits for individual ASTI members in accepting the proposals including:

- Avoiding an increment freeze
- Inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale
- Continued alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions
- The Ward Report measures and a revised sequence for filling posts which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before
- An increase in the quantum of the Croke Park hours that can be worked on other than a whole-school basis
- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours
- Protection against compulsory redundancy
- The €1,000 increase now being paid to public servants on 1 April 2017, brought forward from 1 September 2017 under the LRA.

ASTI members have voted to reject the proposals put forward aimed at resolving their dispute and in consequence, to reject the Lansdowne Road Agreement. It is regrettable that many ASTI members will now suffer permanent financial losses and loss of other benefits as a result of this choice.

The proposals represented the final outcome of the process and there will be no further offer made to ASTI. The Government is committed to continuing to work with unions inside the agreement in progressing consideration of pay and conditions issues. The work of the Public Service Pay Commission is now underway in this regard.

Special Educational Needs

165. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve access to special educational supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16867/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

This year, 13,015 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of the 2016/17 school year, which is an increase of almost 23% in the number of posts available since 2011. The demand for 2017/18 will not be known until the NCSE application process is complete.

There are currently over 12,500 learning support and resource teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools. An additional 900 teaching posts have also been provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

In addition, over 150 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there are now 1,152 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.

125 special schools also provided specialist education for those pupils who need it.

In recent years, the NCSE has provided my Department with a number of policy advice papers on the provision of supports for children with special needs, all of which are available on the NCSE's website. It is intended to bring into effect many improvements to the provision of special educational needs support, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

As committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the adequacy of the present policies and provision and their scope for improvement is being examined. The NCSE are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the SNA Scheme to ensure better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Following its pilot, the new model for allocating special needs teachers has been introduced in schools.

I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required, to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education, will be provided.

Irish Sign Language

166. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve access to Irish Sign Language courses for students with hearing disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16868/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are a number of specific supports in place for students who learn through Irish Sign Language (ISL) and a number of initiatives which seek to promote, develop and implement ISL in order that it will achieve greater recognition and use in the education system. These include:

- special schools for the deaf have been encouraged in relation to the use of sign language in class.

- funding for an ISL weekly home tuition service through which deaf tutors visit the homes of deaf pre-school children and deaf school-going pupils to provide training in ISL for the deaf children, pupils, their siblings and parents.

- funding is also made available through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) to enable individual teachers and whole school staff to undertake courses in Irish Sign Language which are available throughout the country through a variety of providers.

Sign language is an option in the Leaving Certificate Applied. There is also an opportunity for students to learn sign language in the course of Transition Year.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative has developed a specification for a short course in Irish Sign Language (ISL) which is available as part of the new Junior Cycle. The emphasis is on developing communication skills in ISL at level A1 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). This course develops students' ability to understand ISL in live, and in recorded situations, to produce the language and to interact with other signers in a simple way and on familiar topics. A link to the course is available at:

http://languagesinitiative.ie/images/ISL/MFL_Gen_Spec_ISL_28_May_Short_Course.pdf.

My Department, through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), has established and funds a Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College, Dublin which provides diploma courses for ISL/English interpreters, deaf tutors and in deaf studies. The course modules deal with issues such as sign linguistics, bilingualism and socio-linguistics of sign language. The course is delivered in seminar sessions/group work and the award of the diploma is based on continued assessment and a project and course design.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published its Policy Advice on the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland which makes a number of recommendations for the improvement of educational provision for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children, including recommendations relating to ISL provision. This policy advice is available on the NCSE's website www.ncse.ie. A number of the recommendations contained in the policy advice on the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children have been, or are currently in the process of being implemented. My Department will continue to implement the recommendations in conjunction with other Departments and agencies where necessary, subject to the availability of resources.

The National Council for Special Education has also published a parental information leaflet for parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, which provides details of the sup-

ports which are available for such children.

Assessment, rehabilitation and information services for children with hearing impairment and their families are funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), either directly or indirectly. Services provided include communication therapy and lip reading classes as well as sign language classes.

School Funding

167. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria used by his Department for deciding on applications for capital funding for junior, senior and post-primary schools. [16869/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The delivery of school projects so that all schools in an area can between them cater for all students seeking a school place is the main focus of my Department capital budget. To this end, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses a range of data sources in carrying out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. The outcome of the latest demographic exercises was that in November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to open nationwide in 2017 and 2018.

The November 2015 announcement also detailed the new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, that will be progressed in areas where significant demographic need has been established. In addition, the 6 Year Programme (2016-21) prioritises projects that in addition to meeting increases in enrolments, have a major deficit of mainstream accommodation capacity for current enrolments, require major refurbishment and replacement of poor accommodation. School projects that were announced under my Department's 5 Year Plan (2012-16) will also be advanced in the Capital Programme.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for smaller scale projects for schools, where an immediate accommodation requirement has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher. In that regard, it is open to schools to apply for funding for additional classroom accommodation, where required.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 158.

Legislative Programme

169. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill; when it is to return to Dáil Éireann, the necessary changes he proposes to make to the draft legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16871/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government outlines that this Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities.

This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030. With regard to the institute of technology sector, the Strategy recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation

within the sector and a pathway of evolution for those consolidated institutes of technology, to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities.

Position of Technological Universities Bill:

In relation to the legislation, the third Government Legislative Programme of this Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage.

I recognise that there were a significant number of matters raised previously in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage. A consultation process is ongoing with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government.

Following the finalisation of this consultation process I will then advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised as part of this consultation process.

State Examinations

170. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the reported failure rate at leaving certificate maths; the measures he proposes to remedy this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16872/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am taking it that the Deputy is referring to the combined numbers of Leaving Certificate Mathematics candidates at all three levels (Higher, Ordinary, and Foundation) who were awarded E grades, F grades or no grade in the 2016 State Examinations. The designation of any performance in the certificate examinations as a 'fail' ceased in 1968.

The nature of curricular examinations such as the Leaving Certificate and the procedures currently in place for awarding grades are such that a certain amount of fluctuation in the grade distribution from year to year is to be expected. Grade distributions are also affected significantly by the proportion of candidates who opt to take the examination at each level. In particular, if the proportion of candidates opting for Higher level increases, the candidates making this move will tend to be those who were towards the higher achieving end of the Ordinary level distribution and will tend to fall at the lower achieving end of the Higher level distribution. This will obviously affect the grade distribution at both levels. Influenced by the combined effect of syllabus change in mathematics, known as Project Maths, and the introduction by the Higher Education Institutions of 'bonus points' for Higher level mathematics, the number of students in recent years presenting for Higher level in Leaving Certificate Mathematics examinations has increased significantly, from 15.8% in 2011 to 28% in 2016.

During the standard-setting process that happens as part of the marking process each year, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) takes account of these and any other relevant factors in the course of satisfying itself that the distribution of grades awarded is appropriate and that it accurately reflects the performance of the candidates in comparison to the achievement standards envisaged when the syllabus was designed.

In the context of a significant migration of mathematics candidates from Ordinary to Higher level, it may be noted that a similar absolute number of candidates awarded E, F or no grade at Ordinary level will inevitably be manifested as a higher percentage, since the total number of

candidates at this level has reduced.

The number of candidates who failed to achieve at least a D3 grade at any level of the mathematics examination in 2016, while marginally higher than in the last three or four years, is very similar to the number in the years before that (2009 to 2011, for example). In the context of the factors mentioned above, there is nothing especially unusual about the grade distribution in mathematics for 2016.

In the case of the current syllabus change in mathematics, there has been a deliberate attempt to increase the emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, including interpretation, problem solving, and dealing with the unfamiliar. These are skills that students find difficult to master and teachers find difficult to instil in students. The syllabus expectations are ambitious at all levels.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will be undertaking a review of the Project Maths initiative, now that the full implementation of all phases of the curricular change is complete. By this time, students will have been through the new mathematics cycle a few times and the NCCA will have good information on which to base the assessment of its impact, especially on the learning of under-achievers. I have asked the SEC to ensure that any lessons that can be learned from candidate performance in recent examinations, and the 2016 examination in particular, be fed into that review process. The Project Maths Implementation Support Group, an industry-education partnership set up by my Department, including third level bodies, Engineers Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, will also be able to provide their considered opinions to this process.

Institutes of Technology

171. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the drop-out rate in third level institute of technology courses; the measures his Department proposes to remedy the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16873/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the overall mission of higher education in Ireland there has been a steady increase in student enrolments over recent years. The most recent report by the HEA on retention and progression, entitled 'A Study of Progression in Higher Education 2012/13 to 2013/14', is available on the HEA website, www.heai.ie. This is the fourth in a series of progression analysis released by the HEA and examines those 1st year undergraduate new entrants enrolled in the academic year 2012/13 and traces them to the following academic year 2013/14. The report gives an in-depth analysis of the non-progression rates by NFQ level, sector, discipline, gender, age, nationality and socio-economic group. There are many factors identified as influencing the likelihood of progression such as Gender, Age at commencement, Prior Educational attainment, nationality and socio-economic grouping.

The report shows that 84% of full-time undergraduate new entrants in 2012/13 progressed to their second year of study in 2013/14. The rates of non-progression in 2012/13 varied within and between sectors ranging from 26% and 28% at levels 6 and 7 to 17%, 11% and 6% at level 8 in universities, institutes of technology and colleges respectively.

The report demonstrates that the overall new entrant non-progression rate was 15% in 2007/08 and has remained constant at 16% from 2010/11 to 2012/13. However, rates of progression do vary across the sector and between disciplines and further work will be done to see how students can best be supported to continue on their course or transfer to another programme.

The HEA through the System Performance and Strategic Dialogue process also monitor progression rates within the institutions on an annual basis. Institutes report on retention measures in place within their institutes to combat high non-progression rates. The HEA funds retention initiatives in Computer Science disciplines in higher education institutions through the Information Technology Investment Fund. In 2015 these initiatives included additional classes, attendance mentoring, teaching and learning initiatives, student support sessions, buddy practicals and maths enabling courses.

In 2016 the National Forum for Teaching and Learning established an ICT Retention Scoping Group to examine ways in which students could be enabled to complete ICT courses. The group working with practitioners and industry recently made a number of recommendations including capacity building within the school system, improved career guidance, sharing of good practice on pedagogy and retention across the sector and strengthen links with the FET and post primary sectors.

One of the key objectives of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (National Access Plan) is to address the issue of non-completion within higher education institutions, for those in under-represented target groups. The Plan also commits to the further development of mechanisms to track the progression, retention and student experience of target groups. The target student groups include entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education; first time mature student entrants and students with disabilities.

To support the implementation of these objectives, a Working Group has been established to consider the issues contributing to the non-completion of target groups in the National Access Plan and to produce recommendations for policy and practice. The group is chaired by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and includes representatives of relevant stakeholders. The HEA, with assistance from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, is currently undertaking a scoping exercise to inform the work of the group.

Apprenticeship Programmes

172. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the lack of apprenticeships suitable for a number of employment vacancies such as chefs and in the hospitality sector generally, to upskill young unemployed workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16874/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In January of this year, I launched the Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, setting out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Programme for Government commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period to 2020. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals in 2015 and also commits to a new call for apprenticeship proposals later this year, to provide for the needs of all sectors, including hospitality and tourism. Over the lifetime of the Action Plan, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes representing a doubling of current activity.

Work is progressing on the development of a new Commis Chef Apprenticeship led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry Education and Training Board. It is planned that this programme will commence later this year. The Apprenticeship Council also recently approved development funding for a separate proposal to

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

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

Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 140.

Third Level Funding

174. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has read the USI position paper on the funding of higher education regarding the effects a loan scheme would have on students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16876/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the USI pre-budget submission and its recommendations for increased funding to the sector. The report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, which considers a number of potential funding options including for the deferred payment of student fees, is currently being examined by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills with a view to making recommendations on a long-term sustainable funding model for higher education. This process includes receiving input from relevant stakeholders and I understand the Union of Students in Ireland is one of the groups who have made a submission. It will be important to obtain political and societal consensus on achieving a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector in the future and my Department and I continue to work with the committee as it undertakes its deliberations.

In follow-up to the Expert Group report, appropriate technical work will be undertaken by an inter-Departmental group chaired by my Department in relation to income contingent student loans in order to inform future funding policy options, including in light of recommendations from the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills.

Increased Exchequer funding of €36.5 million was secured in Budget 2017 for the higher education sector. This includes an increase in the funding available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and other under-represented groups to assist them in overcoming financial barriers to accessing and completing higher education. Provision is also being made in the Department's expenditure ceiling in 2018 and 2019 for demographic increases which cumulatively represents an additional €160 million investment in the sector over the period 2017-2019.

In addition, the Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently undertaking a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. It is estimated that the mechanism, which proposes an increase in the National Training Fund levy from 0.7% to 1% between 2018 and 2020, could yield close to an additional €200m revenue in 2020. Comments on the proposal may be submitted to the Departments of Education and Skills and Public Expenditure and Reform by 5 p.m. on Thursday 13th April 2017. Full details of the consulta-

tion process are available on the websites of both Departments.

The intention is that, taken together, these approaches will contribute to and inform the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the higher education and further education and training sectors.

Teacher Recruitment

175. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the shortage of substitute teachers for primary schools and the difficulties this is causing for school principals and managers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16877/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In overall terms my Department does not have evidence of a recent or current general shortage of primary teachers, including for substitute positions. However, I am aware that some schools are experiencing difficulty in recruiting substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The aim of my Department's policy is to achieve a balance between the supply of, and demand for, teachers. The Deputy will be aware of the report of the Technical Working Group (TWG) which was set up by the Teaching Council to formulate advice on teacher supply and which I intend to publish this week.

The TWG's report sets out an approach to planning which scopes out the work necessary to develop a model for teacher supply in the medium to long term. In the meantime, I am committed to advancing short term measures to address potential shortages of substitute teachers, including the employment by schools of retired teachers and those on career break and an increase in the number of days per school year that a post primary teacher on career break may work as a substitute.

School Management

176. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16889/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are no schemes or provisions currently in operation along the lines set out in the details supplied with the Deputy's question.

Supporting school leadership is a major priority of mine, and I am conscious of the importance of developing and motivating school leadership at all levels. Budget 2017 allowed me to make a start at re-investing in school leadership in terms of Deputy Principal and middle management posts. Questions of school leadership improvement and development are the subject of ongoing consideration and review by my Department.

Suggestions and proposals to support school leadership improvement and development may be considered in that context. In considering suggestions which have cost implications, such as for example those set out in the details supplied with the Deputy's question, it is essential to have regard to the most effective use of financial resources, and value for money for taxpayers.

Brexit Issues

177. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to assist the 12,000 Irish students studying in Britain in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16897/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under existing rules, all EU higher education students are treated the same as a national from the country in which they seek to study. Depending upon the negotiated terms of Brexit there may be future implications for Irish students studying in the UK. My Department is keeping this matter under constant review and it is my stated intention to seek to have the best outcome for our students.

A principal concern of mine is to protect to the greatest extent possible student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the UK and within the EU and to support our strategy to increase non-EU student flows. I am particularly concerned to facilitate the continued feasibility of the UK as an option for our further and higher education students.

With such issues in mind a key part of my approach has been to engage on Brexit-related matters at political and institutional level. I have met my counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and most recently met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. I also met the Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Kier Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. I have also had meetings with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission at which our priorities and concerns were raised.

In relation to Irish students currently studying in Higher Education Institutions in the UK and those planning to do so in the coming years, the UK Government have outlined that the EU referendum outcome and the triggering of Article 50 will not lead to any immediate change to the immigration status of current EU students, including those that are on courses in this academic year (2016–17).

It has also been outlined in separate statements from across all UK nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) that current university students from the EU and those applying to courses starting in 2017–18 will not see any changes to their loan eligibility or tuition fee status. This position will apply for the full duration of the course, even if the course finishes after the UK has left the EU. For students looking to study in Scotland, this position has been extended to those enrolling for 2018–19.

Separate statements from across all UK nations confirm that current EU students, including 2016–17 entrants, will remain eligible to receive loans and grants to fund their studies for the duration of their courses.

EU students attending universities in England and Wales who are eligible under current rules to receive loans and grants from the Student Loans Company will continue to do so for the duration of courses they are currently enrolled on. This has been confirmed by the Student Loans Company for England, and by Universities Wales for Wales.

Under EU law, students from EU member states applying for undergraduate degrees at Scottish universities are currently eligible for free tuition. For EU students attending a university in Scotland, the Scottish government and Universities Scotland have confirmed that there has been no change in current funding arrangements. This means that eligible EU students already studying in Scotland, including those that commenced their studies the current academic year (2016–17) will continue to benefit from free tuition and, for those who meet the residency re-

quirement, associated living cost support.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy has issued a statement confirming that EU nationals who are currently receiving student loans from Student Finance Northern Ireland, including those that started courses last autumn (in the 2016–17 academic year) will continue to receive these loans and grants until they finish their course.

EU students applying for a course starting in 2017-18:

- In England: The Government has outlined that EU students applying to start a course in England in 2017-18 will continue to be eligible for tuition fee loans and for ‘home’ fee status for the duration of their study.

- In Wales: The Education Secretary has announced that EU nationals who intend to begin studying in the academic year 2017-18 will also continue to receive financial support.

- It has also been confirmed in a statement from the Scottish Government that students starting courses in 2017 at universities in Scotland will continue to receive free tuition and other support for the full duration of their course.

- Similar announcements have been made in respect of EU students applying to universities in Northern Ireland. Student Finance Northern Ireland has said that EU nationals currently in higher education and those who intend to begin studying from 2017 who are assessed as eligible to receive loans and/or grants, will continue to receive these until they finish their course.

EU students applying for a PhD starting in 2017-18:

It has been confirmed by the UK Government that EU nationals starting courses in the next academic year (2017-18) will continue to be eligible for Research Council PhD studentships to help fund their studies for the full duration of their course. This will be the case even if the course finishes after the UK has left the European Union.

The foregoing is the most up-to-date information available to my Department in relation to the implications of Brexit on EU Students (including Irish students) currently studying or wishing to study in Higher Education Institutions in the UK in the coming years.

However, to ensure the utmost clarity for each individual student, I would advise all prospective Irish and other EU students to contact the higher education institution they are planning to apply to, or which they are already attending, in order to absolutely confirm its policy with regard to fees and tuition support for 2017-2018 and into the future.

My Department, as with all Government Departments, is continuing to engage with these matters and to plan for scenarios that might arise out of the EU-UK Brexit discussions. We will continue to contribute to the EU preparations for negotiations and to assist with those negotiations to the greatest extent possible.

Apprenticeship Programmes

178. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expand on plans to provide apprenticeships and skills training in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16898/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Following the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, the Apprenticeship Council was

established in November 2014 to oversee the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new sectors of the economy. The Council immediately began work on a call for proposals for the development of new enterprise-led apprenticeships. The call issued in January 2015 and over 80 proposals were received from industry stakeholders working with education and training providers.

The Apprenticeship Council has been working with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them in sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. The first of these new apprenticeships commenced recently with the launch of the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship in September 2016 and the new Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship in November 2016.

Three further apprenticeships in the manufacturing area have also recently completed validation and approval. Employers in those areas, including those in the Kildare region, will be able to recruit apprentices to these programmes shortly. Ten further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including financial services, hospitality and ICT and a pipeline of new apprenticeships is in place for subsequent years. This pipeline will be refreshed through the launch of a new call for proposals later this month.

I have also launched an Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, which sets out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Programme for Government commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals and also commits to a new call for apprenticeship proposals later this year. Over the lifetime of the Plan, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes which represents a doubling of current activity.

Registrations in the 27 craft apprenticeship trades are rising strongly as the employment and economic situation improves and I welcome that employers throughout the country are engaging strongly with the apprenticeship system. In 2015 there were 3,153 registrations in existing apprenticeships which represented a 17% increase on the previous year. In 2016 there were 3,742 new registrations in craft apprenticeships, 182 of which were taken on in the Kildare region. This year the strong growth in new registrations continues with 893 apprentices registered at the end of February, 48 of which are in Kildare. Current forecasts are that annual registrations will increase to 4,147 in 2017 and 4,697 in 2018.

A campaign to promote apprenticeship is currently being developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners, including the Apprenticeship Council. The campaign will raise awareness and promote the values of apprenticeship for individual apprentices and for employers and it will cover both existing apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships now coming on stream.

On a broader note a number of strategies have been developed by the education and training system at all levels to meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace. Last year my Department published the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 both of which contain over 100 actions designed to see the system become the best in Europe over the next decade. Some of these actions are specifically aimed at ensuring that the labour force has access to education and training provision that equips them with the skills that enterprise needs, now and in the future.

In 2016, as part of the National Skills Strategy 2025, nine Regional Skills Fora, including one in the Mid-East covering County Kildare, were established. The Mid-East Regional Skills Forum has identified a number of sectors including the agrifood film/audio visual, construction, hospitality, manufacturing and the equine sectors where there are skills needs. In order to ad-

dress these skills needs the Forum has, and will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

179. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the summer works scheme application from a school (details supplied); when decisions on applications for the summer works scheme will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16932/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis for the years 2016 and 2017. An application for window replacement was received from the school in question and under the classification for the SWS, window replacement comes under Category 7.

Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced last April and are published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. The application from the school referred to is available to be considered in this context. I expect to be in a position to announce a further round of the SWS in due course.

Consultancy Contracts Data

180. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State agencies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16982/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy is not routinely collated by my Department.

My officials are making inquiries with the State bodies under the remit of my Department and will supply the information sought by the Deputy as soon as possible.

Brexit Issues

181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17000/17]

182. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17016/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions

Nos. 181 and 182 together.

Under the direction of my Department's Management Board, the EU/International Unit under the leadership of a Deputy Secretary General is working with Departmental Divisions and Agencies on analysing and prioritising issues in preparation for the negotiation phase. Between December and January the Unit oversaw extensive engagement that I and Minister of State John Halligan TD had with the education sector in the form of four Brexit consultation fora for the higher, further education and training; and primary and post-primary education sectors.

The EU/International Unit has also supported my engagement at political and institutional level on our Brexit agenda. I have met counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and most recently met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. Meetings were also held with the Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Kier Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. Meetings have also taken place with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission including Commissioner Navracsics.

While no dedicated Unit has been created, the EU/International Unit of my Department has been given overall responsibility for co-ordinating our response to Brexit. This Unit has been prioritising Brexit work to date and will keep staffing requirements under constant review.

In discharging its Brexit-related functions, the EU/International Unit participates in the Inter-Departmental Senior Officials Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which coordinates the whole-of-Government response to the outcome of the UK referendum, and supports the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. This is further underpinned by the Unit's active engagement with other Departments in Brexit Workgroups on the Economy and Trade; the Common Travel Area; and European Union Programmes - three of the six sectorial workgroups established to provide key sectorial or thematic advices to the Cabinet Committee and Government. The Unit also chairs the Education and Research Subgroup under the Economy and Trade strand of co-ordination. The Subgroup includes relevant areas within the Department and relevant Agencies of the Department and other Departments/Agencies.

As specific issues on the negotiations agenda emerge, the Department will ensure timely, focused inputs from the relevant policy areas and external stakeholders, through appropriate consultative mechanisms.

Significant additional resource requirements are not envisaged for the negotiation phase, but for those that will arise, it is anticipated that costs arising can be provided for from within existing Departmental budgets.

Labour Court Recommendations

183. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to ensure that a Labour Court recommendation (details supplied) hearing on 29 May 2013 relating to the pay of four workers is fully implemented; if he will provide an update on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17055/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, in the context of measures necessary to restore order to the public finances, Government pay policy has been consistent in its approach to the processing of cost-increasing pay claims. Accordingly, non-binding Labour Court recommendations which will result in a pay increase, such as those referred to by the Deputy, are precluded from implementation. This was provided

for in the Haddington Road Agreement and continues to be provided for in the Public Service Stability Agreement (Lansdowne Road) 2013-2018.

Following lengthy discussions facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) in August 2013 and February 2014, terms of reference were agreed for an internal job evaluation exercise to establish the correct rate of pay for the employees of all grades within the Tyndall National Institute. The terms of reference covered all staff in the Institute comprehended by the unions' parity claim, including those staff who were the subject of a previous Labour Court recommendation (LCR 20577). The terms of reference provided for an Oversight Committee comprised of management and union representatives to monitor progress and prevent delays. An appeals process was also agreed between the parties which could be invoked following the conclusion of the evaluation exercise.

Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) were appointed to conduct the exercise following a tender process. The selection was made by a joint panel made up of representatives of the employer and both unions.

It was also agreed that, following completion of the internal job evaluation exercise, the parties would engage in discussions to seek agreement on the implementation of PwC's recommendations and the outcome of the appeals process. In the event that agreement could not be reached the matter would be referred to the Labour Court and the parties would be bound by the outcome.

The PwC job evaluation report was presented to the parties in December 2014 and as part of the appeals process, an independent appeal officer heard and reported on appeals by Tyndall staff. The parties met under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission in relation to the effective implementation date of the recommendations of the Job Evaluation Exercise. Agreement could not be reached on the implementation date and that matter was referred to the Labour Court for a binding decision. I understand that the Labour Court has very recently recommended that the outcome of the Job Evaluation Exercise be implemented in full with effect from 12 September 2016.

Intellectual Property Protocol

184. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of spin-out companies co-located in higher education institutes, broken down by institute in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17068/17]

185. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of spin-out companies co-located in higher education institutes, broken down by institute in tabular form; the details of the percentage shareholding in each company held by the higher education institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17069/17]

186. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the higher education institutions have a role to play in the governance of intellectual property policy; if they have carried out a review into intellectual property policy in recent years; if they have plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17070/17]

187. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the revenue accrued by higher education institutions in respect of the sale of spin-out companies from 2008 to date in 2017, by institute, by amount and by year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17071/17]

188. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that all staff and management of higher education institutes, who are directors or have been directors since 2008, and those who had or have a shareholding in spin-out companies co-located in the institutions where they have worked have complied fully with their statutory and ethical obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17072/17]

189. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of vice presidents of institutes of technology or heads of research in institutes of technology who were directors or shareholders in spin-out companies co-located in the institute in which they are employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17073/17]

190. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of current presidents of institutes of technology who are or were directors or shareholders in spin-out companies by institute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17074/17]

191. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the office that is the policyholder of intellectual property policy in higher education institutes; if it varies from institution to institution; the name of the office in each institute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17075/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 to 191, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and I will arrange for it to be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

School Admissions

192. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will give urgent consideration to the concerns outlined in correspondence (details supplied) to his Department regarding school admissions policy; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of schools under the patronage of Protestant churches and particularly the smaller schools in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17123/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that I ran a public consultation process from 24th January to 20th March 2017 on the role of religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

I believe that it is unfair that preference is given by publicly funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school. I also believe that it is unfair that parents, who might otherwise not do so, feel pressure to baptise their children in order to gain admission to the local school.

I am aware of the concerns of the Protestant and other minority churches and I specifically outlined in the consultation paper of the need to avoid possible pitfalls and unintended consequences, including possible impacts on minority religions and on the wishes of Protestant, Jewish, Islamic and other communities to be able to run schools in accordance with their ethos and admit children from their communities to attend those schools.

Other possible consequences to be avoided include possible breaches of the constitution, technical and administrative difficulties impacting on the capacity to effectively run the system of over 4000 schools and the possibility of creating 'postcode lotteries', such as other countries

have experienced, resulting in pronounced divergence in the quality of schools in more advantaged compared to less advantaged areas.

The 8 week phase of receiving written submissions formed part of the broader 12 week consultation process which will include additional steps, including any follow-up consultation that is required, collation of responses and development of next steps.

My Department has begun the process of examining the submissions and formulating next steps. Clearly I will not make any decisions around next steps until such time as all of the submissions have been examined and considered.

Skills Shortages

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which upskilling facilities continue to remain available to maximise the capability of the workforce in changing or challenging times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17127/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Development and implementation of strategies that plan and provide for workforce training will play a key role to incentivise both workers and employers to invest in upskilling and acquisition of knowledge to empower a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Within the education and training system there are a range of strategies now in place to support upskilling opportunities in order to maximise the capability of the country's workforce.

My Department published its Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 last year. The Action Plan contains hundreds of actions to be implemented with particular focus on re-skilling and upskilling employees to meet the existing and future skills needs of employers.

In addition, published in 2016, the National Skills Strategy 2025, contains over 125 Actions and sets an ambitious trajectory for the next ten years for skills development in Ireland and marks an important step in the evolution of Ireland's education and training system to a system which fully supports upskilling and lifelong learning and is more responsive than ever to the changing needs of participants and enterprise.

SOLAS is currently overseeing the development of a Policy Framework for Employee Development in order to guide activity undertaken by the Further Education and Training (FET) sector to support employee development. This will be published in Q2 2017.

The recent launch of the Action Plan to Extend Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-202 is being used to promote the essential skills attained from VET as a route to skilled employment and not just as a stepping stone to higher education. A further call for Apprenticeships is scheduled in the near future.

Skillnets, co-funded through the Irish National Training Fund and the European Social Fund, supports and works with businesses in Ireland and their employees to address their current and future skills needs by providing high quality, subsidised training through their training networks in a range of regions and sectors.

Springboard+ provides free higher education places, primarily to jobseekers in need of upskilling or re-skilling to allow them to re-enter the labour market and involves a job placement. From 2017 the eligibility criteria for Springboard+ will be expanded to include homemakers and those in employment in the Biopharma/Med Tech sector who wish to upskill or reskill to

meet a specific emerging skills need.

Apprenticeship Data

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the number of apprenticeships created in the past 12 months; the likely development in this area in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17128/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, the first of the new programmes developed through the Apprenticeship Council's first call for proposals, launched in September 2016 and the Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship commenced in November 2016. Three further apprenticeships in the manufacturing area have also recently completed validation and approval. Employers in those areas will be recruiting apprentices shortly.

Ten further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including financial services, hospitality and ICT and a pipeline of new apprenticeships is in place for subsequent years. This pipeline will be refreshed through the launch of a new call for proposals later this month.

Special Educational Needs Staff

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which the requirements in terms of special needs teachers and SNAs has been met at primary and second level for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17129/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

This year, 13,015 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of the 2016/17 school year, which is an increase of almost 23% in the number of posts available since 2011. The demand for 2017/18 will not be known until the NCSE application process is complete.

There are currently over 12,500 learning support and resource teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools. An additional 900 teaching posts have also been provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

In addition, over 150 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there are now 1,152 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.

125 special schools also provided specialist education for those pupils who need it.

In recent years, the NCSE has provided my Department with a number of policy advice papers on the provision of supports for children with special needs, all of which are available on the NCSE's website. It is intended to bring into effect many improvements to the provision of special educational needs support, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

As committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the adequacy of the present policies and provision and their scope for improvement is being examined. The NCSE are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the SNA Scheme to ensure better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Following its pilot, the new model for allocating special needs teachers has been introduced in schools.

I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required, to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education, will be provided.

Schools Building Projects Status

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which negotiations have taken place with the relevant authorities to facilitate the construction of a urgently needed special school (details supplied); the reason the construction of a new bridge was allowed to interfere with the construction of the school; if discussions will take place to resolve the matter at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17130/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme (2016-2021).

The Patron of the school is providing the site for the proposed project and my Department have sought clarification from the Patron on the implications, if any, that the matter referred to by the Deputy may have for the project.

Apprenticeship Data

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the number of apprenticeships throughout the various trades awarded in County Kildare in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17131/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Following the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, the Apprenticeship Council was established in November 2014 to oversee the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new sectors of the economy. The Council immediately began work on a call for proposals for the development of new enterprise-led apprenticeships. The call issued in January 2015 and over 80 proposals were received from industry stakeholders working with education and training providers.

The Apprenticeship Council has been working with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them in sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. The first of these new apprenticeships commenced recently with the launch of the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship in September 2016 and the new Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship in November 2016.

Three further apprenticeships in the manufacturing area have also recently completed validation and approval. Employers in those areas, including those in the Kildare region, will be able to recruit apprentices to these programmes shortly. Ten further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including financial services, hospitality and ICT

and a pipeline of new apprenticeships is in place for subsequent years. This pipeline will be refreshed through the launch of a new call for proposals later this month.

I have also launched an Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, which sets out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Programme for Government commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals and also commits to a new call for apprenticeship proposals later this year. Over the lifetime of the Plan, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes which represents a doubling of current activity.

Registrations in the 27 craft apprenticeship trades are rising strongly as the employment and economic situation improves and I welcome that employers throughout the country are engaging strongly with the apprenticeship system. In 2015 there were 3,153 registrations in existing apprenticeships which represented a 17% increase on the previous year. In 2016 there were 3,742 new registrations in craft apprenticeships, 182 of which were taken on in the Kildare region. This year the strong growth in new registrations continues with 893 apprentices registered at the end of February, 48 of which are in Kildare. Current forecasts are that annual registrations will increase to 4,147 in 2017 and 4,697 in 2018.

A campaign to promote apprenticeship is currently being developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners, including the Apprenticeship Council. The campaign will raise awareness and promote the values of apprenticeship for individual apprentices and for employers and it will cover both existing apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships now coming on stream.

On a broader note a number of strategies have been developed by the education and training system at all levels to meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace. Last year my Department published the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 both of which contain over 100 actions designed to see the system become the best in Europe over the next decade. Some of these actions are specifically aimed at ensuring that the labour force has access to education and training provision that equips them with the skills that enterprise needs, now and in the future.

In 2016, as part of the National Skills Strategy 2025, nine Regional Skills Fora, including one in the Mid-East covering County Kildare, were established. The Mid-East Regional Skills Forum has identified a number of sectors including the agrifood film/audio visual, construction, hospitality, manufacturing and the equine sectors where there are skills needs. In order to address these skills needs the Forum has, and will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders.

Teacher Data

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the number of extra teachers who have taken up employment at primary and second level over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17132/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of additional teaching Staff (Full-time Equivalent Posts) allocated in the past twelve months to primary schools was 1,224 and 1,150 to post primary schools. The figures are projected at present and will be confirmed at the end of June 2017.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which special needs school places are readily available at primary and second level throughout the country at appropriate locations to ensure the availability of such places within reason for children seeking the facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17133/17]

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which facilities for children with autism or Asperger's syndrome continue to remain available and accessible at primary and second level throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17138/17]

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which facilities to meet the educational needs at primary and second level, of children with autism or Asperger's syndrome throughout County Kildare remain available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17139/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199, 204 and 205 together.

The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

In respect of children with Special Educational Needs who cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided.

The Deputy will also be aware that it is the role of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes and special school placements where the need for such placements has been identified.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required.

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. Special Classes and Special Schools are staffed with a lower pupil-teacher ratio ranging from 6-1 to 12-1, on the basis of disability categorisation of pupils attending the school.

There are currently 1,152 special classes nationally, which is an increase of over 100% on the number available in 2011. Of these, 126 are ASD early intervention classes, 526 are primary ASD classes and 236 are post-primary ASD classes. The remainder are non-ASD special classes. 125 special schools also provide specialist education for those pupils who need it, from infants to eighteen years of age.

With regard to Kildare in particular there are 4 special schools, 7 non-ASD special classes Special Classes and 59 ASD special classes, including 6 ASD early intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, must take into account the present and future potential need, location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas. In this regard the NCSE has advised that they are continuing to engage with schools in opening special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision and in order to ensure there are sufficient placements available to meet demand.

Parents/guardians may contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs and to seek assistance in identifying placement options, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Accommodation

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his programme for the replacement of prefabricated buildings continues at primary and second level throughout the country; the number of prefabs still to be replaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17134/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention that over the lifetime of my Department's 6-year Capital Programme (2016-2021) to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established. To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to delivered the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment when finalised will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 for this initiative in the programme.

As the Deputy will also be aware, it can be necessary to make use of temporary rented accommodation in order to meet the accommodation needs of schools, when an immediate or short-term need arises. For example, a school may require a temporary building in circumstances where a major school construction project is planned. Such temporary accommodation is removed when the major project concerned is completed.

National Educational Psychological Service

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which psychological assessments are accessible as required in the primary and second level sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17135/17]

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 focused consultative approach to maximise 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.

I would advise that if there are concerns in relation to the educational or social and emotional development of any student these should be raised by the parents, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to Principal discussing the situation with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local NEPS service.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios continue to improve arising from the steps taken over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17136/17]

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

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demographic need, curriculum reform, additional guidance posts, additional resource teaching posts, additional teaching support for DEIS schools and the strengthening of school leadership.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

Digital Strategy for Schools

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which e-technology has become available to all schools at primary and second level throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17137/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision that is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experience of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

This policy document sets out a plan to embed ICT in teaching learning and assessment through an ambitious programme of works for the period 2015-2020 across a number of headings:

- Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT
- Theme 2: Teacher Professional Development
- Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy
- Theme : ICT Infrastructure

An evidence-based approach was used to develop the Strategy, including an analysis of the 2013 online census of teachers and principals (available at http://www.erc.ie/documents/ict_cencus2013_summaryreport.pdf). The survey showed that teachers and schools are positively disposed to using ICT and are reasonably well resourced in that regard but there remains some challenges in the areas of connectivity at primary level and in training and development. The four Themes emerged as a roadmap for the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment.

The implementation of the Strategy is currently underway with funding of €210m committed towards its implementation. The first tranche of this funding, €30m, issued recently to schools for the upgrade of ICT infrastructure. The need to provide funding for this purpose was highlighted in the Census analysis. The criteria for funding provides that each school is expected to draw up an eLearning Plan using a whole school approach and taking account of its context and circumstances. The Plan will outline the vision of the school for the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment and incorporates targets and priorities for improvement and development.

Presently, all schools in the country are offered a broadband internet connection to promote and facilitate the use of eLearning Technology. There is a vast array of internet-based digital tools in use in classrooms, including Interactive Whiteboards, laptops, desktop computers, projectors, tablet computers, software packages and apps, visualisation and mapping tools, digital content and resources.

The decision on which digital tool to use to best support teaching and learning in the implementation of the curriculum is made by each individual school. The emphasis will now however be on the use of these digital tools to effectively embed ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in line with the Digital Strategy.

The PDST Technology in Education provides a range of support services for schools on the effective use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment through a variety of means including workshops, blended learning CPD courses, good practice videos, advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools. It is part of the national support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers and operates under the remit of my Department. It also manages the Department's on-line Education Portal Scoilnet.ie which is a key source of online high quality digital content made available for all schools and facilitates sharing of digital resources and good classroom practice between teachers. The website provides in ex-

cess of 12,000 + resources aligned with the primary School Curriculum and the Post Primary Subject Syllabus.

Questions Nos. 204 and 205 answered with Question No. 199.

Student Universal Support Ireland

206. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason SUSI has not issued a reply to a query (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17145/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My officials have contacted SUSI who has advised that the delay in responding to the Deputy's request was because it was in the process of carrying out a full review of the case. This review is now complete and shows that the applicant in question commenced renewing her application on 23 June 2016 but failed to complete it before the priority closing date of 8 July 2016. SUSI subsequently announced a final online closing date of 3 November 2016 which the applicant also appears to have missed.

Under the statutory based Student Grants Scheme, decisions regarding late applications are matters to be determined by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).

The online application system for the 2016/17 academic year, closed on the 3rd of November 2016. Students wishing to make an application after that date must satisfy one of the following criteria in order to be granted access to make a late application:

1. The course started after the online closing date;
2. The applicant had a change of circumstance after the online closing date, regarding one or more of the following:
 - Reckonable income;
 - Number of dependent children;
 - Relevant persons commencing an approved course;
 - Normal residence;
 - Nationality or immigration status; and/or
 - Change of course or institution.
3. The applicant experienced extenuating circumstances that adversely affected her ability to make an application prior to the online closing date of 3 November 2016 e.g. a close bereavement or medical condition.

Having made enquiries with the awarding authority, I have been advised that this student did not meet the qualifying criteria for late applications and was notified accordingly.

Summer Works Scheme

207. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will sanction the necessary funds for a school (details supplied) for the much needed upgrade works that were deferred in 2016 and are due to be carried out in 2017. [17146/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers has been approved funding for electrical works under my Departments Summer Works Scheme 2016/2017.

The school recently requested a funding uplift for the project on foot an increased scope of works. Further information has been requested from the school on foot of this development. When this has been received and reviewed, a decision will issue to the school directly.

Election Management System

208. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if approval will be given to visually impaired voters to vote independently by secret ballot in view of the recent decision by the High Court on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16930/17]

231. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the right of visually impaired voters to vote in secret following the recent High Court ruling; the steps he will take to ensure these rights are implemented. [17062/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 231 together.

My Department endeavours to ensure that the voting process is as accessible and inclusive as possible, while ensuring the integrity of the ballot. To that end I made regulations on 20 October 2016 - the Electoral Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 537 of 2016) - which provide for ballot paper templates to be provided at polling stations at referendums. These templates will facilitate visually impaired voters to vote in secret. My Department is in the process of procuring, on behalf of returning officers, ballot paper templates for use at referendums. A tendering process for this has been completed in recent weeks with the helpful input of the National Council for the Blind in Ireland and returning officers. Existing arrangements, where a visually impaired voter may seek the assistance of a companion or a Presiding Officer, at a polling station, remain unchanged. My Department will, in 2017, continue examination and consideration of arrangements to facilitate visually impaired voters to vote in secret at elections. This will include re-examining the possible use of ballot paper templates for elections.

In the meantime my Department is examining the 30 March 2017 judgement of the High Court in advance of the Order of the Court being made.

Planning Issues

209. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to support the provision of local community and social, infrastructure and services in Dublin 5 and Dublin 13 including the newer North Fringe region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16833/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The promotion of higher densities of physical development along transport corridors and other strategic urban locations promoted through high level planning policy frameworks must be accompanied by investment in enabling physical and social infrastructure.

This broad approach is enshrined in the 10 principles of national policy set out in the Na-

tional Planning Policy Statement 2015, Principle 2 of which states that:

“Planning must proactively drive and support sustainable development, integrating consideration of its economic, social and environmental aspects at the earliest stage to deliver the homes, business and employment space, infrastructure and thriving urban and rural locations in an economically viable manner that will sustain recovery and our future prosperity.

Furthermore Principle 2 states that:

“Planning is about creating communities and further developing existing communities in a sustainable manner by securing high quality urban design through the design, delivery and co-ordination of new development providing a good quality of life for all existing and future users of land and buildings.

More broadly, the national level policy approach in relation to residential densities in urban areas is set out in my Department’s Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, published in May 2009 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which are available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=sustainable%20urban%20development>.

The objective of these Guidelines is to ensure local authorities bring about high quality and sustainable urban development using their development planning and management functions to deliver:

- quality homes and neighbourhoods;
- places where people want to live, work and raise families; and
- places that work in relation to the provision of infrastructure.

The Guidelines set out the policy context for achieving sustainable development by balancing the need to ensure the highest standards of residential design, which encompasses building lay-out, design and heights, and the need to ensure efficient use of scarce land and infrastructural resources and the avoidance of urban sprawl. The Guidelines place a heavy emphasis on the importance of provision of public infrastructure, such as public transport, community and sports facilities, as densities increase towards more central urban locations, and on the key role of the development plan process in securing effective sustainable urban development outcomes.

The National Planning Framework will further develop the policy in this area, for example in relation to identifying potential to build up the population and economic vitality of town centre and inner urban areas that in many cases have witnessed a sustained movement of people outwards to suburban and wider settings. The output of the consultation phase, together with consideration of the full Census 2016 results in April, will feed into a draft National Planning Framework document, to be published during summer 2017.

My Department has also issued guidelines on ‘Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities’ which are available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf>. These guidelines aim to assist in achieving the objectives set out in the Government’s statement on housing policy ‘Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities’ (see <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C2091%2Cen.pdf>). The guidelines point out that successful design of good quality sustainable housing projects must take account of the availability of key services and amenities, such as shops, schools, churches, parks and playing fields, community meeting places, recreation and leisure facilities.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives legislative effect to the commitments in ‘Putting People First’, including the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority administrative area. A key function of each LCDC is to prepare the community elements of a 6-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and to work with partners in the implementation of the plan. LECPs are developed as part of an integrated local, regional and national planning process. This ensures that each Plan will be consistent with County Development Plans, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The purpose of the Plan is to promote the local and community development of the relevant local authority area through a more coordinated and collaborative approach to planning and service delivery.

My Department provides funding to support social inclusion and for social cohesion in communities. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The Programme was rolled out in April 2015, and will run until 31 December 2017. Its aim is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. SICAP is a key intervention for the harder to reach, with delivery in each area (or Lot) overseen and managed by the relevant LCDC in the local authority area.

The SICAP funding allocation for 2017 nationally is €37.5m, which includes an allocation of €3m under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. Northside Partnership delivers SICAP in Dublin 3, 5, 13, and 17 (Dublin Northside, Lot 2.3, which encompasses areas such as Fairview, Priorswood, Darndale, Donaghmede, Artane, Killester and Dollymount) on behalf of Dublin City LCDC (with a funding allocation for this area of some €1.1m this year).

In 2017, SICAP will assist approximately 1,375 individuals with education and employment support. Approximately 62 community organisations in the Lot area will be supported through SICAP in 2017 in subjects such as capacity building and organisational development, support to leaver funding, governance training and assistance to participate in local and regional decision making structures. The following organisations are supported through SICAP in the Dublin 5 and Dublin 13 areas;

- Artane / Coolock Resource Centre,
- Artane Beaumont Rec. centre,
- Belmayne Youth and Community Group,
- Donaghmede Mens Shed, and
- Clongriffin Residents Association.

Furthermore, my Department recently launched the national €2 million Communities Facilities Scheme which is under the remit of my colleague, Catherine Byrne T.D. Minister of State for Communities and the National Drugs Strategy. The Communities Facilities Scheme is targeted at both urban and rural areas. The scheme will fund projects that seek to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level. The Scheme is being managed at a local level by the LCDCs in conjunction with the Municipal Districts, under the remit of the local authorities.

The Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to launch a recast RAPID programme and my Department is currently finalising the necessary arrangements, with the intention of launching it shortly.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

210. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the review of the social inclusion and community activation programme; his plans for the programme; and the reason seniors are not included as persons under SICAP. [16935/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. Its aim is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

SICAP is a key intervention for the harder to reach, with delivery in each area (or Lot) overseen and managed by the relevant Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in the Local Authority area. SICAP supports for individuals are primarily aimed at people of working age, although there is scope to assist local community groups comprising of older people from disadvantaged areas, through the Programme.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government has given a commitment to strengthen the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, SICAP. In light of this, and the commitment to providing a successor Programme to SICAP when the current Programme comes to an end on 31 December this year, my Department is leading out on a number of actions which will lead to a better understanding of SICAP and its impacts, and which will inform my Department in reshaping the next iteration of SICAP.

My Department is holding a targeted national consultation process which will assist in the design of the next programme. The consultation process, which I have been leading, consists of national and regional sessions and a number of focus groups in which feedback is being sought from the key stakeholders involved. The consultation process offers a platform to consider how the programme can be refined and for solutions to be put forward in order to strengthen the programme from 2018. In addition, the ESRI has begun a qualitative study looking at SICAP goals and its governance structure as part of a wider evaluation project.

There will also be a qualitative research project looking at a cohort of SICAP participants - young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) - carried out by an external provider in 2017. This research will examine how SICAP’s Programme Implementers identify and engage with this target group, look at the types of outcomes being achieved for them, and put forward good practice examples to inform the next iteration of the programme.

Waste Management

211. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the potential health risks associated with dog breeding establishments spreading dog faeces on tillage fields; and his plans to cease this public health hazard. [16936/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding, transport or management of waste is a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and I have no function in this regard.

Planning Issues

212. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the current regime in planning effectively allows developers a free hand once planning permission is granted, without any meaningful prospect of sanction by either removing an unauthorised construction or applying for retention permission, in the event of planning violations, breaches of planning permission in particular or of planning law in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16937/17]

213. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on enforcement as an aspect to the planning process; his further views on the desirability of funding the following activities (details supplied) money spent on the following to be money well spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16938/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 212 and 213 together.

My role, as Minister, in relation to the planning system is mainly to provide and update the legislative and policy guidance framework. The legislative framework comprises the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, (the Act) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

With regards to policy guidance, my Department has issued a large number of planning guidelines (available on the Department's website, www.housing.gov.ie) under section 28 of the Act, to which planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are obliged to have regard in the exercise of their planning functions. The day-to-day operation of the planning system is, however, a matter for the planning authorities.

Under planning legislation, enforcement of planning control is a matter for the relevant planning authority which can take action if a development does not have the required permission, or where the terms of a permission have not been met. Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including an enforcement issue, with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

There are extensive enforcement provisions provided for in Part VIII of the Act, with a view to ensuring that works pertaining to permitted developments are carried out in accordance with the planning permission granted and any associated conditions and that no unauthorised development takes place. If a person is of the view that any development works being undertaken are not in compliance with the permission granted or are unauthorised, s/he may make a written complaint to the relevant planning authority who shall investigate the matter and take any appropriate enforcement action, including, where necessary, the seeking of a Court order requiring that the development is carried out in conformity with the planning permission and any condition pertaining to that permission.

If an enforcement notice is not complied with, the planning authority may itself take the specified steps and recover the expense incurred in doing so. A planning authority may also seek a Court order under section 160 of the Act, requiring any particular action to be done or not to be done.

In May 2013, a Ministerial Policy Directive was issued to all planning authorities, reminding them of their statutory obligations under Part VIII of the Act relating to enforcement. The Directive required that planning authorities ensure that sufficient and appropriate human re-

sources are made available for enforcement purposes. It also required planning authorities to undertake appropriate monitoring of planning enforcement and directed them to prioritise large-scale unauthorised development and enforcement cases.

I am satisfied that planning authorities have sufficient enforcement powers at their disposal under the existing legislation. Further to the Policy Directive referred to, it is a matter for planning authorities to ensure that they assign appropriate resources for effective planning enforcement.

Housing Policy

214. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will set up a housing advisory council to monitor the Government’s activity in this area, similar to the Fiscal Advisory Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16939/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In response to the current very challenging housing crisis, rooted in a chronic under-supply of housing, the Government has published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, with the objective of increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures, to help individuals and families find homes.

Clear and well defined governance structures are in place to ensure that Rebuilding Ireland is implemented effectively across the range of lead Departments and Agencies. The overall implementation is being overseen by a dedicated Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach. This approach provides for a regular, inter-Departmental, review of implementation and analysis of market conditions. The Cabinet Committee is supported by a Senior Officials Group and specific Rebuilding Ireland-related structures are in place, including an Oversight Group and Project Board with membership from relevant Government Departments, local authorities, approved housing bodies, the construction industry and other stakeholders across the housing spectrum. In addition, the development of individual policy initiatives involves extensive public consultation and engagement, and housing issues have been the subject of considerable engagement with stakeholders on the National Economic and Social Council.

This inclusive and informed approach will help to ensure that well planned, high quality, socially integrated and affordable housing is delivered.

I am satisfied that there are appropriate governance arrangements in place and there are no plans to establish a housing advisory council along the lines suggested.

Control of Dogs

215. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the current scientific evidence on which the legislation governing the control of dogs is based, in particular the evidence that has determined the breeds of dogs listed for control in the regulations; the method by which breed type is currently identified; if he is satisfied that current identification methods are scientifically sound; if he is satisfied that the current regulatory regime for the control of dogs is based on sound scientific evidence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16950/17]

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

Coveney): The Control of Dogs Acts 1986 (as amended) set out a range of requirements for all dog owners or any other person in charge of a dog. The Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 (as amended) set out further requirements that owners of specific breeds of dogs have to follow, namely that such dogs must be muzzled and led, on a sufficiently strong leash or chain not exceeding 2m in length, by a competent person over 16 years of age when in a public place.

Several jurisdictions have addressed the matter of restrictions of particular breeds of dogs in a similar way to Ireland, based on the experience and behaviour of particular breeds in those countries. England, Northern Ireland, France and New Zealand all have similar restrictions on specific breeds of dog.

I am satisfied that the legislation is fit for purpose and I have no plans to further amend the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 (as amended).

Irish Water Data

216. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will instruct Irish Water to provide the list of residential properties in County Tipperary in its possession that still have lead water pipes in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16951/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the supervisory authority for public water supplies. The procedures to be followed where there is non-compliance with the parametric value for lead of 10 microgrammes per litre, and the roles of the water supplier, the EPA and the Health Services Executive (HSE), are set out in the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library.

I have no role in monitoring implementation of the Regulations. However, I understand that in cases where the presence of lead pipes were found on the customer side, which may have resulted in exceedances of the statutory limit, customers have been advised by Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Consultancy Contracts Data

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16983/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each

5 April 2017

Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as follows.

email address for each agency

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Irish Water Safety	oireachtas@iws.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Pobal	oireachtasqueries@pobal.ie

Brexit Issues

218. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17001/17]

219. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17017/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 219 together.

Matters in relation to Brexit are managed by the team responsible for the existing coordination of EU and international business in my Department, with input from relevant line sections and experts across the organisation, as necessary. The relevant team, in the Assistant Secretary led Corporate and Business Support Division, is headed by a senior official at Principal Officer level and, while there are no staff deployed full-time to the issue, three people are involved directly at various times along with input from a larger number of staff across the organisation as required. Brexit-related matters are also kept under regular review by my Department's Management Board. Apart from the normal staff and overhead costs, which have not been quantified to date, no specific additional funding has been allocated in my Department for Brexit-related matters at this point in time.

Brexit is a Government-wide issue and my Department has been working closely with other Departments on the preparations to date and will continue to do so in the negotiation period ahead.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

220. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of newly built social housing units that have been con-

structed in Dublin 7 and 9 in the past 12 months in tabular form. [17028/17]

232. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of newly built social housing units that have been constructed in Dublin, 5, 13 in the past 12 months, in tabular form. [17147/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 232 together.

My Department has published a comprehensive status list of all social housing construction schemes that are advancing nationwide, as at end-Quarter 4 of 2016. Over 500 approved schemes were listed that, when completed, will deliver some 8,500 new social homes. The schemes range from those that are being designed, through to those currently on site and those completed in 2016. It showed that over 650 new social houses were built in 2016 and a further 90 schemes, delivering over 1,800 newly built social houses, went on site last year.

Details of the individual projects involved are set out in the status list, which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>.

A range of other actions are also underway by local authorities to respond to housing need. These include targeted acquisitions, the new Repair and Leasing initiative, rapid delivery housing, and the full roll out of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.

Homeless Persons Data

221. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if persons accommodated in family hubs will be included in his Department's statistics on the number of homeless persons in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17029/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The official monthly homelessness data report published by my Department is compiled from information provided by housing authorities and produced via the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. The 'family hubs' currently being delivered by housing authorities are categorised as supported temporary accommodation and accordingly the details of households accommodated in such arrangements will be reflected in the monthly reports published by my Department.

These reports are published on my Department's website as soon as they are available and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Local Authority Housing Data

222. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of new build local authority completions excluding voids and regeneration units for each year since 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17030/17]

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

Coveney): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Details regarding the volumes of new build local authority completions (which do not include voids or regeneration units) can be found on the Department's website at: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1b1-la-bld-by-area_5.xlsx.

Housing Issues

223. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the relevant legislation governing short stay rental accommodation providers, such as (details supplied); the need for reforms to this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17031/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Article 10(4) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, dealing with change of use exemptions for planning purposes, provides that development consisting of the use of not more than 4 bedrooms in a house, where each bedroom is used for the accommodation of not more than 4 persons as overnight guest accommodation, shall be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provided that such development would not contravene a condition attached to a permission under the Act or be inconsistent with any use specified or included in such a permission.

The interpretation and application of provisions relating to exempted development in any particular case is in the first instance a matter for the local planning authority concerned, or An Bord Pleanála on appeal or referral.

Similarly, responsibility for enforcement action in relation to any breach of the planning code is a matter for individual planning authorities, under Part VIII of the 2000 Act. Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including enforcement, with which a planning authority is or may be concerned.

It should be noted that a recent determination by An Bord Pleanála in a particular case has determined that the exclusive use of a residential apartment for short-term holiday lettings is a material change of use requiring planning permission. Therefore, the continued operation of the apartment in question without such planning permission could be considered to be unauthorised development and subject to enforcement proceedings by the relevant local authority under the Planning Act.

In this connection, my Department has, by way of Circular letter PL12/2016 of 22 December 2016, brought this determination to the attention of all planning authorities to ensure that they are aware of:

- the grounds on which the Board reached its decision,
- the planning implications in terms of the requirement for such commercial use of residential units to be the subject of an application for planning permission, and
- the importance of a pro-active approach to planning enforcement generally in this regard.

A copy of the Circular letter is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_12-16_aph_6-16_recent_an_bord_pleanala_decision_on_short_term_lettings.pdf.

In the wider context, in December 2016, Government approved the publication of a Strategy for the Rental Sector, which delivers on a commitment made under Pillar 4 of Rebuilding Ireland. The Strategy is structured around 4 key areas: security, standards, supply and services. The measures under these four headings will be implemented through the 29 actions contained in the Strategy.

In terms of rental accommodation supply, the focus in the Strategy for the Rental Sector is on maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply, reflecting the shortages in the supply of rental accommodation in key locations, particularly in urban areas. In some of these areas, there is also significant demand for transitory short-term accommodation. In this context, providing short-term rentals at higher prices may be an attractive option for landlords.

However, the implications of the above-mentioned determination by An Bord Pleanála has raised a number of regulatory and other related issues, such as tax liability, residential tenancy regulation, support for tourism, and planning. The Strategy for the Rental Sector provides for the establishment by my Department of a working group, comprising representatives of relevant stakeholders including local authorities, relevant Departments, public bodies and other interests in the area, with a view to providing more information on the scale and nature of the issue and full clarity regarding the appropriate regulatory approach to be adopted in relation to short-term tourism related lettings. The working group is due to report in Quarter 2 2017.

In the meantime, my Department is in active discussions with organisations involved in short-term letting with a view to establishing collaborative agreements within the coming weeks to ensure that those property owners involved in such letting have the required planning permissions.

Approved Housing Bodies

224. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of information on estate management fees payable by tenants living in social housing managed by approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17032/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Where social housing units are provided by AHBs under Payment and Availability (P&A) arrangements with local authorities, it is a condition of such funding that rents be determined in accordance with the differential rents scheme of the housing authority in which the house is situated. The AHB must obtain written permission from the housing authority if it intends to impose any additional charges on the tenant.

If, during the term of the P&A agreement, additional charges are proposed to be levied on tenants, the housing authority must seek confirmation from my Department that the proposed additional charges are permitted.

Where sheltered housing is provided by AHBs under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), my Department's guidance states that rents should be at levels which are reasonable having regard to tenant's incomes and the outlay of the AHB on the accommodation.

Housing Policy

225. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the main differences in the way in which local authorities and approved housing bodies select or approve tenants; the legal basis for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17033/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Households wishing to obtain social housing support from a housing authority or an approved housing body must first apply to the relevant local authority for a social housing assessment. Where the household is deemed qualified for support it is placed on the housing authority's waiting list, and offers of suitable accommodation are made in accordance with the authority's allocation scheme as they arise.

The allocation scheme is made by the elected members under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and in compliance with Social Housing Allocation Regulations made thereunder, and specifies, among other things, the manner of, and the order of priority for, the allocation of dwellings to households on the housing and transfer lists. Under section 22, an allocation scheme shall apply to dwellings owned or under the control of a local authority, as well as dwellings provided by approved housing bodies with Exchequer funding.

Approved housing bodies are independent not-for-profit organisations, which operate in accordance with their Memorandum and Articles of Association and stated rules. Where a vacancy arises in a dwelling owned by an approved housing body, the relevant housing authority may nominate suitable households from its housing or transfer list to that body, having regard to the order of priority set out in its allocation scheme.

Such nomination rights are linked to the provision of funding by my Department under its capital and current funding schemes for social housing. The rules in this regard are set down in my Department's memorandum on Capital Funding Schemes for the Provision of Rental Accommodation by Approved Housing Bodies (Voluntary and Co - Operative Rental Housing) of May 2002, and related circulars, and the relevant Payment and Availability Agreements in force. Approved housing bodies may also, in consultation with the relevant housing authority, make its own nominations for a proportion of tenancies in accordance with the relevant funding rules for tenancies in a housing project funded under a capital scheme.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

226. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 497 of 17 January 2017, the details of the 4,698 AHB new build units to be completed under the Rebuilding Ireland plan, showing the number of new build units to be completed by each AHB by 2021, in tabular form. [17034/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland sets out ambitious but achievable targets for social housing delivery across a blend of delivery mechanisms including the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector, who will be relied upon to deliver significantly not only under the Build category, but also under Acquisitions and Leasing.

It is expected that AHBs will deliver Build units through models such as the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and the pipeline of delivery which has been established thus far under these schemes is available on the compre-

hensive status list of social housing schemes can be accessed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>.

This status report lists the 504 approved social housing construction projects and their locations and contains a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered in 2016 and those at the various stages of advancement through planning, design and construction. 191 of these projects, or in excess of 3,000 units, have already been approved and are being actively delivered by AHBs under the CAS and CALF schemes.

Some of these projects will be completed in 2017 and others will commence on site during the year, as well as in subsequent years; the precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the AHBs concerned in the first instance.

Targets by individual AHB have not been set for the programme; rather the AHBs apply to my Department or the Local Authority as appropriate on a project by project basis depending on the market availability, their capacity and the demand for the relevant units as confirmed by the Local Authority. The following link provides access to the construction status report in a format that may be analysed on an AHB basis:

<https://data.gov.ie/dataset/construction-status-report-2016-for-quarter-4>

Further project approvals are being added to the published list as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs, details of which will be included in the next quarterly report under Rebuilding Ireland.

I am keen that all local authorities and AHBs advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

227. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of first, second and third time HAP, housing assistance payment, tenancies set up each year since the scheme was introduced in tabular form; the number of first HAP tenancies still in place; and the average tenancy length to date of HAP tenancies. [17035/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The details on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies you have requested are not collated by my Department.

Since commencement of the HAP scheme in September 2014, over 22,340 HAP tenancies have been set-up, which includes 2,370 tenancies which subsequently closed. HAP is currently being paid in respect of some 19,970 separate households across all 31 local authority areas.

HAP is a demand-led scheme and households may exit the scheme for a variety of reasons, including accessing other forms of social housing support. At the end of December 2016, 240 households had exited the scheme to avail of other forms of social housing support.

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme committed to under Rebuilding Ireland.

5 April 2017

Housing Policy

228. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the actions being taken by his Department to encourage the development of new private houses in the State, particularly in Dublin, after a reported decline of 17% of new houses for sale in 2016; the current level of participation in any State programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17045/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question No. 339 of 4 April 2017 which sets out the position in this matter.

Water Meters Expenditure

229. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the cost to the State of the water metering programme, including the cost of the meters and the cost of installation to date. [17059/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The expenditure incurred on the domestic metering programme, including the cost of meters and installation, amounted to €467m (including VAT) resulting in Irish Water installing over 891,500 meters on completion at the end of January 2017. The domestic metering programme was funded by Irish Water borrowing facilities.

Gender Balance

230. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if, in view of the recent statement by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, he will commit to publishing data on gender segregation within our local authorities on a regular basis; the details of a gender breakdown of employees at each grade (details supplied) for each of 31 local authorities, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17060/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered does not provide detail on gender breakdown. My Department will however, be working with the sector to collect the data with a view to publishing the figures later this year and on an annual basis thereafter.

Question No. 231 answered with Question No. 208.

Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 220.

Local Authority Rates

233. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the degree to which commercial rates legislation has changed in the past three decades; if schemes to incentivise or disincentivise certain behaviours, for example, dereliction, vacancy, conversion of part into accommodation, have been attempted and the way in which they have fared; the degree of flexibility local authorities have in designing or applying

such schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15998/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes, in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

The legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, dating back to the Poor Relief (Ireland Act) 1838. There have been six enactments relating to commercial rates in the past 30 years. The following table sets out the enactments and the relevant sections where appropriate.

Enactment	Relevant Sections
Local Government (Dublin) Act 1993	Section 37
Local Government Act 1994	Sections 45 and 47
Urban Renewal Act 1998	Section 10
Local Government Act 2001	Section 103
Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006	Section 7
Local Government Reform Act 2014	Sections 29 to 34, Schedule 1 Part 2, Schedule 2 Part 6, Schedule 4 paragraphs 14 and 15

With regard to the specific issues raised by the Deputy, section 10 of the Urban Renewal Act 1998 allowed local authorities to remit rates in support of the objectives of an integrated area plan, developed under that Act. With regard to relief for vacant premises, section 31 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 introduced changes to the legal provisions in this area. It provides the elected members of individual local authorities with the power to vary the level of rates refunds that apply in individual local electoral areas within the authority's administrative area. The Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 provide that the decision to alter the rate of refund should be taken at the annual budget meeting and that the rate of refund decided in respect of the relevant local electoral area shall apply to eligible persons for the year to which the budget relates. The absence of a decision to vary the refund means that the existing legislative provisions regarding the rate of refunds apply. A derelict property would not be capable of beneficial occupation and hence would not be liable for rates.

I have asked my Department to develop proposals for a consolidated Rates Bill to modernise and consolidate the legislation in this area. Among the measures being considered for inclusion in the General Scheme of the Bill are provisions to allow a local authority to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support local and national policy objectives. I hope to bring proposals in this regard to Government shortly.

Wind Energy Guidelines

234. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the publication of updated setback guidelines for wind farms; the reasons for a delay in publishing the guidelines; the setback distance to be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13946/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since May 2016, I have been liaising closely with my colleague Minister Naughten, having regard to his responsibility for renewable energy policy, on the review of the 2006 Wind

Energy Development Guidelines relating to noise, setback and shadow flicker, recognising the need to bring the review to a close to give certainty on the matter to all stakeholders, local authorities, the energy sector and the wider community.

In light of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to finalise the Guidelines and on-going policy and legal developments in this area, my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, is continuing to advance work on the Guidelines and related matters in order to bring the various issues to a conclusion as early as possible.

I expect to be in a position to make a statement on the matter in the coming weeks, outlining the proposed revisions to the Guidelines and the timelines for implementation of the various elements.

It is important to note that as part of the overall review, and having regard to a recent ECJ Judgement on the Belgian/Wallonian wind energy guidelines, it is proposed to undertake a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the proposed revisions to the 2006 Guidelines before they come into effect. This is in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

In light of the SEA requirement which will take approximately 9 months, it is likely that while the proposals for revisions to the Guidelines will be available shortly, the Guidelines will not be finalised and come into effect until approximately the end of the year.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála are required have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

Constitutional Amendments

235. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the referendum in respect of voting rights in presidential elections for Irish citizens outside the State, which was announced recently, will be held. [13986/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government recently decided to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution to give the right to vote at presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State, including Northern Ireland.

In order to inform public discourse on the significant policy change proposed, I published an Options Paper on 22 March 2017, which is available on my Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/presidential-elections/voting-presidential-elections-citizens-resident>. The Options Paper sets out the range of options available to give effect to the recommendation in the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution. It will also provide a basis for a discussion on voting rights, which will be one of the topics to be addressed at the Global Irish Civic Forum in Dublin in May. These considerations will inform the preparation of the necessary legislation for a referendum. No decision has been taken by Government in relation to the timing of the referendum.

If approved in a referendum, the extension of the franchise, as proposed, would require modernisation of the voter registration process and the introduction of arrangements to facilitate those eligible to vote to exercise their franchise from outside the State. Accordingly, the Government has agreed that my Department should now commence work to effect improvements in the registration of voters.

State Pension (Contributory) Appeals

236. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting times for appealing decisions on State pension contributory applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16829/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The average processing time for state pension contributory appeals to the end of March 2017 is 39.3 weeks for appeals requiring an oral hearing, and 27.5 weeks for appeals which were determined by means of a summary decision.

Appeal processing times are kept under constant scrutiny by the Chief Appeals Officer and significant effort and resources have been devoted in recent years to reducing the length of time taken to finalise an appeal. This has resulted in a marked improvement in processing times.

Average processing times for state pension contributory appeals have reduced from 55.3 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 46.0 weeks in 2015, 45.9 weeks in 2016 and 39.3 weeks to date in 2017. The average processing time for state pension contributory appeals determined by way of a summary decision increased slightly over the same period from 24.9 weeks in 2011 to 26.0 weeks in 2015, 25.6 weeks in 2016 and 27.5 weeks to date in 2017.

The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time-lags involved. However the system is designed to be flexible and fair and allows for review and submission of further information at all stages. The time taken is proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which require a high level of judgement, and the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times will continue to be a priority for her office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Treatment Benefit Scheme

237. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views regarding the fact that private hearing aid companies are unregulated in the State, in view of the fact that grants for the purchase of hearing aids are made available to these companies through the PRSI system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16881/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The treatment benefit scheme provides for a contribution towards the purchase of medical appliances, such as hearing aids. In 2016 some 9,500 people benefitted from this element of the scheme, at a cost of over €7.5m.

The scheme currently has over 100 providers, who are required to operate under the terms of their contractual agreement with the Department. This contract covers the qualification of persons providing the service, the scope of the examination provided and the resolution process

in event of a dispute or complaint from a customer.

The HSE, who also supply a large number of devices under their corresponding medical card scheme, has convened a group of stakeholders who are working on developing agreed standards in relation to the provision of hearing aids. The group has representatives from the Irish Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (ISHAA), the Irish Academy of Audiology (IAA) and DeafHear (who advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing in Ireland), working along with the HSE on developing standards. The group are currently finalising best practice guidelines to ensure a code of practice code is in situ for the profession in Ireland.

The Department welcomes the development of agreed guidelines for the provision of hearing aids; such guidelines will make a significant contribution to the provision of consistent clinical practice and service delivery to the Department's customers.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

238. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will allow cystic fibrosis to be listed as a disease in which minors with the condition avail of the free travel scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16891/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are currently approximately 877,000 people in Ireland in receipt of free travel at an annual cost of €80 million per annum.

The free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. Applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment in order to qualify for the scheme. The qualifying payments for those aged under 66 are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement. Free travel is provided for people in receipt of carer's allowance to facilitate their caring role and support their social inclusion.

Children with disabilities may qualify for the domiciliary care allowance. This is a monthly payment of €309.50 to the carer of a child with a disability. The allowance may be used for the additional costs involved in caring for the child and this may include additional transport costs. On most transport services children under sixteen years of age are charged fares at special concessionary child rates.

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

Any decision to extend the free travel scheme to persons who are not in receipt of a primary qualifying payment would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Job Initiatives

239. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) participating in JobPath can be released from the programme in order to take up a community employment scheme position in view of the fact they have previously completed a different CE scheme placement; if consideration will be given to such requests in situations in which difficulties have been encountered in having the available CE scheme position filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16931/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The aim of the JobPath service is to assist participants in finding sustainable full-time paid employment by providing intensive individual support and assistance. It is distinct from the Community Employment scheme which provides part-time employment and training opportunities in local communities for people on a range of Social Welfare payments including long-term unemployment payments as a stepping stone back to employment. Community Employment does not, nor is it intended to, provide full-time sustainable employment.

Jobseekers can only participate with one activation scheme or service at a time; this is to ensure that the best use is made of the available places and to allow the scheme and service providers time to work with the participants. However, people who on the date of their referral to JobPath have a written offer with a start date within four weeks for CE will be facilitated to take up their placement.

In these circumstances the person in question cannot be released from the JobPath programme.

If any CE scheme is having difficulty filling a position they should contact the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Payments

240. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a family income supplement payment has been suspended from any person for engaging in industrial action since the introduction of the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16945/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is no provision in social welfare legislation which allows for the suspension or termination of FIS in the event that the recipient is involved in industrial action. However, the existence of erroneous information on this topic on a subpage of the Department's website, based on a misinterpretation of secondary legislation, recently came to light.

The Department took immediate steps to remove this erroneous information when it was discovered.

While there was no formal procedure in place for staff to proactively review FIS recipients who may have been involved in trade disputes, my Department recently reviewed available records dating back ten years and can confirm that, from 2007 to date, no FIS recipient has had their payment suspended due to their being involved in an industrial dispute.

The Department is of the view that it is unlikely that anyone has had their FIS payment suspended for this reason but will continue to review available pre-2007 records.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

241. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting time for a decision on an appeal for social protection payments paid on a weekly basis in cases where there is no oral hearing and in cases where there is an oral hearing in 2017; the number of persons awaiting a decision in each instance, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16960/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The average appeal processing times to date in 2017 for social protection payments which are paid on a weekly basis, broken down by oral hearing and summary decision, are set out in the following table. In addition, a table showing the number of appeals relating to those schemes which are currently on hand is also provided.

Appeal processing times are kept under constant scrutiny by the Chief Appeals Officer and significant effort and resources have been devoted in recent years to reducing the length of time taken to finalise an appeal. This has resulted in a marked improvement in processing times.

The overall average processing time, across all schemes, for appeals requiring an oral hearing reduced from 52.5 weeks in 2011 to 25.5 weeks in 2015, 24.1 weeks in 2016 and 24.5 weeks to date in 2017. The overall average time taken to finalise appeals decided by way of a summary decision has also improved in recent years from a peak of 25.1 weeks in 2011 to 18.1 weeks in 2015, 17.6 weeks in 2016 and 18.3 weeks to date in 2017.

The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time-lags involved. However the system is designed to be flexible and fair and allows for review and submission of further information at all stages. The time taken is proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which require a high level of judgment, and the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times will continue to be a priority for her office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeal processing times for Social Protection payments paid on a weekly basis

1 January 2017- 31 March 2017

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Person’s Pension	16.2	30.1
Carers Allowance	19.4	22.3
Carers Benefit	16.3	21.1
Disability Allowance	15.3	20.9
Illness Benefit	23.8	30.4
Partial Capacity Benefit	40.9	35.4
Deserted Wife’s Benefit	-	13.7
Farm Assist	18.8	21.4
Family Income Supplement	17.5	43.8
Invalidity Pension	32.4	22.1
Maternity Benefit	17.2	-

Questions - Written Answers

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
One Parent Family Payment	23.7	30.5
State Pension (Contributory)	27.5	39.3
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.2	37.0
Occupational Injury Benefit	14.1	32.4
Incapacity Supplement	54.2	56.9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	19.1	19.1
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	12.9	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.2	25.4
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.1	24.1
BTW Family Dividend	19.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	11.5	38.8
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.5	18.1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	20.6	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	17.8	21.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	28.5	17.7

**Appeals on hand for Social Protection payments paid on a weekly basis
1 January 2017- 31 March 2017**

-	Appeals on hand
Blind Pension	4
Carers Allowance	1,455
Carers Benefit	31
Disability Allowance	1,911
Illness Benefit	212
Partial Capacity Benefit	23
Deserted Wives Benefit	2
Farm Assist	89
Family Income Supplement	278
Invalidity Pension	404
Maternity Benefit	32
One Parent Family Payment	151
Paternity Benefit	3
State Pension (Contributory)	238
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	180
State Pension (Transition)	2
Occupational Injury Benefit	18
Incapacity Supplement	3
Guardian's Payment (Con)	12

-	Appeals on hand
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	6
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	789
Jobseeker's Allowance	776
BTW Family Dividend	22
Jobseeker's Transitional	22
Pre-Retirement Allowance	2
Jobseeker's Benefit	229
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	621
Survivor's Pension (Con)	15
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	14

Social Welfare Benefits Data

242. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons awaiting a decision on their entitlement to social welfare payments and the average waiting time for an initial decision to be made in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16961/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the following table.

Social Welfare claims by average waiting times and number of claims pending 28 February 2017

Scheme	Average Waiting time(weeks)	Claims Pending
Jobseeker's Benefit	1	2,847
Jobseeker's Allowance	2	6,795
One-Parent Family Payment	6	1,117
State Pension Contributory	5	4,260
Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	1	316
Widowed Parent Grant	1	17
Living Alone/Island Allowances	N/a	488
State Pension Non-Contributory	N/a	2,108
Household Benefits	1	2,350
Free Travel	2	13
Domiciliary Care Allowance	15	2,148
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1	3,443
Child Benefit (Domestic & FRA)	3	1,670

Scheme	Average Waiting time(weeks)	Claims Pending
Child Benefit (EU Regulation)	31	1,100
Treatment Benefit	N/a	26,748
Maternity Benefit	N/a	4,813
Paternity Benefit	N/a	1,695
Family Income Supplement (New)	3	2,921
Family Income Supplement (Renew)	N/a	1,047
Carer's Allowance	N/a	3,468
Carer's Benefit	N/a	439
Disability Allowance	N/a	5,828
Invalidity Pension	N/a	1,966
Illness Benefit	N/a	5,020
Occupational Injury Benefit	N/a	127

Consultancy Contracts Data

243. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16990/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am advised that no private investigation firms have been hired by statutory agencies or semi-states, under the aegis of my Department, in the past five years to date in 2017.

Brexit Issues

244. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17008/17]

245. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17024/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 and 245 together.

The Department's EU and International section [including Irish-UK Relations] is led by an Assistant Secretary. The Irish-UK Relations unit has, at present, three additional staff assigned to it, two Assistant Principals and one Executive Officer on a four-day per week basis due to worksharing.

In addition to the salary costs for the three extra staff referenced above, additional budgetary resources have been assigned to this unit under the Department's Administrative Budget to cover travel and subsistence and the cost, where necessary, of facilitating the Department's Brexit consultative process with key stakeholders. Both staffing and funding requirements are being kept under continuous review.

More generally, the Management Board of the Department of Social Protection has been fully engaged with the social protection implications of the vote by the UK to leave the EU and, indeed, the earlier negotiations on the UK's relationship with the EU; a sub-group of the Management Board is in place and the Board also receives regular updates on the key developments relating to Brexit.

Disability Allowance Data

246. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of increasing disability allowance in line with inflation plus €4 in each of the years 2018 to 2022. [17027/17]

247. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing disability allowance by €20 and index linking it to inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17063/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 247 together.

The Department of Finance's 2017 Budget Day book provides forecasts for inflation for the five years 2017 to 2021 inclusive. The projected inflation for 2018 as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) is 1.8% and 1.9% for the years 2019 to 2021, inclusive. A projection for 2022 is not available.

The following tables outline the rate increases by year and associated costs. These costings are based on 2017 recipient numbers and do not take into account changing trends in recipient numbers from 2018 onwards. In addition, the costs are based on increases to the personal rate of disability allowance (DA) only, currently €193 per week.

Table 1: Increase personal weekly rate of disability allowance by HICP inflation plus €4 each year

-	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total rate increase (inflation plus €4 each year)	€7.50	€7.80	€8.00	€8.10
Weekly rate of DA (2017 = €193.00)	€200.50	€208.30	€216.30	€224.40
Full year cost of increase (€m)	49.9	51.8	53.1	53.8

Table 2: Increase personal weekly rate of disability allowance by €20 and inflation

-	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total rate increase	€23.80	€4.10	€4.20	€4.20

-	2018	2019	2020	2021
Weekly rate of DA (2017 = €193.00)	€216.80	€220.90	€225.10	€229.40
Full year cost of increase (€m)	158.0	27.2	27.9	27.9

There is an analogous social insurance payment, Invalidity Pension (€198.50 per week), which is paid to people who are permanently incapable of work (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria and a minimum number of paid qualifying PRSI contributions). Each €1 increase in the weekly rate of Invalidity Pension would cost €2.9 million in a full year.

In addition, Blind pension is available for those aged 18 to 66 who are blind or visually impaired. The cost of a €1 weekly personal increase in the Blind Pension is €0.07 million in 2017 and a full year.

It should be noted that (i) in the event of the Disability Allowance weekly rate exceeding the Invalidity Pension rate, some Invalidity pensioners (number not determinable) would transfer to the means tested Disability Allowance scheme to avail of the higher rate on that scheme; (ii) the costs shown above do not include the cost of proportionate increases for qualified adults; (iii) any additional costs which might arise as some persons in receipt of other welfare schemes might potentially apply for and qualify for Disability Allowance thereby also benefitting from a higher rate of payment than that which applies to their current scheme or (iv) offsetting savings on the Rent Supplement scheme as the additional weekly increase would reduce the level of entitlement under that scheme.

Carer's Allowance Applications

248. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17122/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 10 January 2017.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 20 March 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Cross-Border Co-operation

249. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there has been progress in negotiating with the Crown Estates about Lough Swilly to provide for the regulation of aquaculture in the lough; if he will expedite a conclusion to the negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16883/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): While I do not have

lead responsibility for the Loughs Agency or aquaculture I am very conscious of the current difficulties arising from unlicensed activity in Lough Foyle.

Following discussions in 2011 between the then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the British Foreign Secretary, the British and Irish Governments agreed to seek to address and resolve jurisdictional issues relating to both Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough.

Since that time a series of meetings have taken place at official level between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and my own Department, the most recent of which was in February this year. The issues involved are complex and involve a range of different actors, including the Crown Estates, but I am satisfied that progress is being made and that all sides are committed to reaching a positive resolution as soon as possible.

Human Rights Cases

250. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) in the West Bank city of Hebron, who has been engaged in non-violent activities against the Israeli occupation for over a decade; and if he will raise the case with his Israeli counterpart. [16970/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the case in question. Irish representatives have discussed the case with this person, and attended his most recent court hearing, along with other EU colleagues. It is my understanding that he wishes his case to proceed to a full trial in order to demonstrate injustices in the system applied to Palestinian activists like himself.

More broadly, the increasing use of legal measures to hinder and prevent peaceful protests against occupation policies is a matter of growing concern, which we have raised both in EU level discussions and directly with Israeli authorities.

Human Rights Cases

251. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied), the leader of the non-violent Palestinian led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, was arrested by the Israeli authorities only days before travelling to the USA to receive the Gandhi Peace Award; that his arrest includes a travel ban (details supplied); and if he will raise this case with the Israeli authorities. [16971/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The difficulties experienced by this person have been discussed on a number of occasions here in the Dáil, and the European Union has previously made representations on his behalf with the Israeli authorities.

On this occasion he has been arrested on suspicion of tax evasion, and it is a condition of his bail that he remain in the country.

There is growing concern about the increasing use of political and legal pressure in Israel to hinder the work of activists and NGOs who are critical of occupation policies, and in particular advocates of BDS. However, I have no basis on which to query the accusation made in this case. My Department will nonetheless remain alert to the case as it proceeds.

Questions - Written Answers
Consultancy Contracts Data

252. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State agencies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16985/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are no statutory or state agencies under the aegis of my Department so the issue raised by the Deputy does not arise.

Brexit Issues

253. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17003/17]

254. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17019/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 253 and 254 together.

Within my Department, the key Divisions with responsibility for Brexit matters are the European Union Division and the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division, both headed at Second Secretary General level. Additional resources have been assigned to both Divisions to cover the issues arising from the UK exit process.

The European Union Division contains a specific team focused on the EU-UK negotiations. Within the IUKA Division, there is a Brexit-specific policy co-ordination function now in place and there are teams focused on Northern Ireland and on wider British-Irish Relations whose core duties include Brexit-related issues. In addition, a number of officers of my Department are seconded to the Department of the Taoiseach and working on EU matters, while two officers are seconded to the International and EU Relations Division of the Department of Finance.

Many business units of my Department at headquarters in Dublin are involved in some way as part of the response to the UK exit, for example, the Legal Division, the Trade Division and the Policy Planning Unit. There is also an intra-Departmental senior management group focusing on issues relating to the UK exit, chaired by the Secretary General and comprising senior officials from across all relevant business units of the Department. Overseas, specific additional posts dedicated to issues relating to the UK exit have been assigned to our Embassies in London, Berlin, and Paris as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union in Brussels, which has a unit dedicated to managing our response to this issue.

It is clear that these exit negotiations will be complex and intensive. To support the negotiation process, my Department received an additional €3.2 million as part of the 2017 allocation. This facilitated the transfer back to my Department from the Department of the Taoiseach of 14 staff to a new, enlarged European Union Division. Programme funds to support the secondment

of Irish staff to the EU institutions and enhanced public communications and debate on the EU issues were also transferred.

The Department has allocated an additional budget of €2 million from the extra allocation provided as part of the 2018 Budget process. This budget will be used to increase the number of staff assigned to the management and support of the negotiations and to increase the level of support provided to our colleagues across all Government Departments and agencies.

It is becoming clearer that there are other implications arising from Brexit that the Department will also need to manage. There has been a sustained increase in passport applications from Britain and Northern Ireland since last June. There has also been a substantial and sustained increase in the number of Foreign Birth Registrations, acquiring citizenship through descent, right across the world. My Department is continually monitoring the additional needs associated with management of this process and engaging with the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform, as necessary.

Diaspora Issues

255. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to roll out the local diaspora engagement fund for 2017; the status on funds allocated to this scheme and a timeframe on when this fund will open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17125/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently considering strategic priorities around all aspects of our engagement with the global Irish as part of the review of the implementation of the 2015 Global Irish - Ireland's Diaspora Policy. Any decisions on the future of our engagement with diaspora communities, both locally and abroad, will be made on the basis of that strategic review and will be announced later in the year.

Flood Relief Schemes

256. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that material from the River Dargle, Bray, County Wicklow, was used for the construction of the R755 road at Roundwood as part of the River Dargle flood protection scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16946/17]

257. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of material that was taken from the River Dargle site in Bray, County Wicklow, as part of the River Dargle flood protection scheme; if a waste licence was applied for to the EPA for the removal of the material; if testing was carried out on the materials, if the material was all in earth material, if the local engineer in Roundwood Vartry Reservoir or Irish Water were consulted on this and if they had any objections to this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16947/17]

258. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that material from the River Dargle, Bray, County Wicklow, was used for the construction of the R755 road at Roundwood as part of the River Dargle flood protection scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16948/17]

259. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount

of material that was taken from the River Dargle site in Bray, County Wicklow, as part of the River Dargle flood protection scheme; if a waste licence was applied for to the EPA for the removal of the material; if testing was carried out on the materials; if the material was all in earth material; if the local engineer in Roundwood Vartry Reservoir or Irish Water were consulted on this and if they had any objections to this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16949/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 to 259, inclusive, together.

The River Dargle flood relief project is being carried out by Wicklow County Council (WCC) with funding provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW). WCC is the Contracting Authority for the project and is responsible for the overall management of the works. The OPW has no involvement in the day to day management of the project.

Wicklow County Council has advised that approximately 32,000 cubic metres of materials were removed from the site and transported to Calary on the Dargle Road. The Council has advised that no Waste License was required. The removal of the material was addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement, published in 2007. In addition, a notification under Article 27 of the European Communities (Waste Directive) Regulations 2011, S.I. No. 126 of 2011 issued to the Environmental Protection Agency in 2016 to the effect that the material was a by-product for re-use and therefore not regarded as waste.

The Materials removed from site were tested in accordance with WAC (Waste Acceptance Criteria) as well as Particle Size Distribution tests. The materials were all inert materials, as classified by WAC. The Wicklow County Council District Engineer has been in contact with the local Engineer that deals with the reservoir in Roundwood who expressed no objection to this work.

Civil Service Remuneration

260. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which the 1984 Civil Service spouses and children's superannuation scheme conforms with the provision of the Payment of Wages Act 1991 on the necessity for written consent from employees for the deduction to be made from their wages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16976/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under Section 5(1) of the Payment of Wages Act, 1991, "an employer shall not make a deduction from the wages of an employee (or receive any payment from an employee) unless -

(a) the deduction (or payment) is required or authorised to be made by virtue of any statute or any instrument made under statute.

(b) the deduction (or payment) is required or authorised to be made by virtue of a term of the employee's contract of employment included in the contract before, and in force at the time of, the deduction or payment, or

(c) in the case of a deduction, the employee has given prior consent in writing to it."

As long as any one of these conditions is met the employer is not prevented from making a deduction from the wages of an employee.

When the Civil Service Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme was first introduced for established civil servants (as the Widows' and Orphans' Contributory Pension Scheme) in 1968-1971, membership of the scheme was made optional for serving male civil servants and compulsory, and thus a condition of employment, for all male civil servants joining after that date. Periodic and non-periodic employee contributions made by deduction from salary (or from any gratuities payable) formed an integral part of the scheme, as was evident from the title of the scheme. The scheme was subsequently extended to all female established civil servants in 1981, when a similar approach on its introduction for male civil servants was followed. The scheme was further amended in 1984, with certain changes made to the benefit and contribution terms, in the Revised Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme. Again, serving established civil servants were given the option to join the scheme while membership was made compulsory - and thus a condition of employment - for all civil servants joining after the effective date of change.

Accordingly, it is clear that employee contributions made under the Civil Service Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme meet the requirements laid down under the Payment of Wages Act 1991, and specifically, Sections 5 (1) (b) and (c) of the Act.

Consultancy Contracts Data

261. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State agencies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16989/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, none of the bodies under the aegis of my Department have hired a private investigation firm over the past five years.

Brexit Issues

262. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17007/17]

263. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17023/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

Brexit issues in my Department are coordinated centrally by the Department's Brexit/EU/ North South Unit. The Unit oversees Brexit work across the Department and acts as the contact point with the Department of the Taoiseach and other Government Departments. It is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Brexit and related groups, and supports me in my work as a member of the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

264. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it is mandatory to hold Irish citizenship in order to apply and be interviewed for a permanent executive officer or administrative officer position in the public service in situations in which a person has applied for Irish citizenship and is currently working under a stamp 4 visa on a temporary contract in the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17037/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Posts in the Irish Civil Service are generally open to suitably qualified candidates who are nationals of an EU Member State, including Ireland, or the European Economic Area (EEA). Such individuals have the right under the EU Treaties to reside and take up employment in any EEA Member State. Non-EEA citizens do not benefit from these rights and do not automatically qualify to compete for these roles.

Section 36 of the Employment Equality Act, 1998 provides that in relation to the holding of office under or in the service of the State, to include Civil Service employment, the imposition of a requirement in relation to citizenship is lawful.

From time to time, professional or specialist posts in the civil service are advertised where, reflecting specific requirements for particular expertise or skills, a more flexible approach is taken and the rules of the competition state that applications from non-EEA citizens are welcome. However, any such candidates are advised that even if successful at interview, an appointment to the post would be contingent on the securing of a work permit.

Stamp 4 denotes and evidences a category of immigration permission to remain in the State (in accordance with the Immigration Act, 2004) that permits the holder to enter employment without the requirement to hold an employment permit issued by the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation. However, Stamp 4 does not confer Irish citizenship on the holder so does not confer eligibility to compete for posts in the Civil Service.

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

265. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider instituting new transparent accounting standards for Government bodies like An Garda Síochána and updating rules around spending to prevent frivolous expenditures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17049/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are robust and well established transparent financial reporting requirements across Government Departments and Offices which also apply to An Garda Síochána. The accounting rules, principles and procedures for Government Departments and Offices are set out in Public Financial Procedures and relevant Circulars issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The standard accounting principles and procedures are applied by Government Departments and Offices in the preparation of their Appropriation Accounts.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Appropriation Accounts, showing the financial transactions of Government Departments and Offices are prepared in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866 (as amended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993) and with accounting rules and procedures laid down by the Minister for Public

Expenditure and Reform. The accounts are a cash-based record of the receipts and payments in the year compared with the amounts provided under the Appropriation Act. The accounts also show prior year figures for comparison purposes.

In addition to the financial reporting requirements principles and procedures established in legislation and set out in Public Financial Procedures new and updated requirements for the management of grant funding provided from public money issued in the form of a DPER Circular 13/2014 - Management and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer

Funds. This circular outlines the public financial management principles, procedures, and additional reporting requirements to be followed in the management of grant funding provided from public money. The fundamental principle is that there should be transparency and accountability in the management of public money, in line with economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The provisions of the circular apply to the movement of funds from a Vote to an outside body, and to any/all onward movements of that funding. The objective is to ensure that all Exchequer funds, regardless of the method of distribution, are accounted for and properly managed.

In addition, all Government Departments and public bodies in receipt of public funding must comply, as appropriate, with the relevant requirements of the Public Spending Code. The Public Spending Code sets out the value for money rules and guidance for spending in all public bodies at all stages in the spending lifecycle before, during and after spending.

The Public Spending Code applies to both capital and current expenditure. The Code outlines what is required of public service managers at different points of the expenditure lifecycle and offers advice on how to fulfil those requirements.

I am, therefore, satisfied that a detailed and comprehensive governing framework has been put in place by my Department as set out above to ensure that there is economical, efficient and effective use of public funds in line with the purpose to which they are allocated. It is, of course, a matter for each Department and public body concerned to ensure that there are appropriate oversight arrangements and structures in place to ensure that this framework is fully implemented in all cases and where any abuses take place, financial reporting and audit systems to ensure as much as possible that these are detected and are addressed.

Consultancy Contracts Data

266. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and-or semi-States under the aegis of her Department in the past five years 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; if she will provide copies of reports submitted to her from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16978/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no private investigation firms have been engaged by those bodies under the aegis of my Department in the period specified by the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

267. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in

her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16996/17]

268. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17012/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

As I advised the House in my reply to Parliamentary Question 409 of 31st January 2017, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established last year to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's EU Coordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit.

The Department also has a full time dedicated attaché assigned to Ireland's Permanent Representation in Brussels. This officer is a member of the Department's Working Group and is also fully involved in the preparations by Ireland's diplomatic team in Brussels.

These arrangements are being kept under review and will be enhanced if required in the coming period.

Hospital Services

269. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of long-term treatment and management of adult intestinal failure across 21 hospitals here; if a cost benefit analysis has been carried out into the streamlining of services with a national centre in place and using a hub and spoke model within the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17141/17]

270. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has received a business case for assessment for the establishment of a dedicated national adult intestinal failure centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17142/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 and 270 together.

I am aware that a business case for the establishment of a dedicated centre for Intestinal Failure is currently being finalised by St James's Hospital. St James's Hospital is part of the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Any proposals for the funding for the centre for Intestinal failure in St. James's will have to be considered as part of the Hospital Group's overall priorities for services across the Group. The business case will need to be submitted to the HSE for consideration as part of the overall 2018 estimates process and with regard to competing priorities for resources available in 2018.

In relation to the specific queries raised about the estimated cost of long term treatment and management of adult intestinal failure across 21 hospitals, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

271. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the level of speech and language services and occupational therapy services in the Dublin 5,13 and 17 areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16828/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

272. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment for orthodontic treatment. [16885/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

273. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of CT and bone scans that were cancelled or missed by patients since 1 January 2017 in the Mater hospital; if these slots are automatically offered to other patients or whether the slots are lost; if there is a protocol in place for this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16886/17]

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

Respite Care Services Provision

274. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if respite services are currently being provided at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; if not, the alternative provisions available to service users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16887/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

275. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the primary health care centre in an area (details supplied); the regional HSE jurisdiction it will come under; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16899/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health and Social Care Professionals

276. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date on regulating both individual audiologists and private companies that sell hearing aids; his views regarding the likely date for such regulation to come into force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16957/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The professions of audiologist and hearing aid audiologist are not included in the 14 professions currently designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

The Act provides that the Minister for Health may, following a consultation process and with the approval of the Houses of the Oireachtas, make regulations designating a health or social care profession not already designated if the Minister considers it in the public interest to do so and if certain specified criteria have been met.

My Department is proposing, towards the end of this year or early next year, when all registration boards have been established, to ask the Health and Social Care Professionals Council to undertake a risk assessment, in terms of public protection, of the principal health and social care professions seeking designation under the Act and to make recommendations concerning options for their possible future regulation. The question of designating the professions of audiologist and hearing aid audiologist will be considered as part of that process.

My Department has no role in the regulation of private companies that sell hearing aids.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

277. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the duration that recruitment panels operate for before they expire; if recruitment panels are lasting for long periods; if newer panels are overridden or absorbed by older panels with the effect that the staff with more up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience may be placed lower on staffing panels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16962/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department does not hold a recruitment licence. Staff for the Department are recruited through the Public Appointments Service. A small number of staff in the Department with specialist skills or experience are seconded to the Department from the HSE and other agencies in the health family, usually for a period of three to five years.

General Practitioner Services

278. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (de-

tails supplied) regarding general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16973/17]

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, especially in remote rural areas and also in disadvantaged urban areas, and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly qualified GPs.

The 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.

Further efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practicing GPs include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of an enhanced supports package for rural GP practices. These steps should help to address the future demand for GPs by enticing GPs who may have ceased practicing for family or other reasons back into the workforce, facilitating GPs to work past the standard retirement age and encouraging more GPs to work in rural areas.

In addition, I have repeatedly emphasised the need for a new GP services contract which will help modernise our health service and develop a strengthened primary care sector, and health service management have already progressed a number of significant measures through engagement with GP representatives in recent years. The next phase of engagement on a new GP contract is under way. I am keen to ensure that future contractual terms for GPs would enjoy the support of the broad community of GPs and in this regard officials from my Department and the HSE are engaging with the relevant GP representative bodies in relation to the wide range of matters which will need to be encompassed by the contract development process. The GP contracts review process will, among other things, seek to introduce further measures aimed at making general practice a fulfilling and rewarding career option into the future.

As the issues raised in relation to Tipperary relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services

279. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when GP access to diagnostics will be extended to a provider in south Tipperary (details supplied); the reason the evaluation of this service was only carried out for two weeks, which was insufficient to realise the real benefits of this service; when the evaluation of this service will be concluded; when the service will be provided to persons in County Tipperary helping to relieve capacity pressures at South Tipperary General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16974/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Consultancy Contracts Data

280. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16986/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to reports from private investigation firms submitted to the Department from statutory agencies under the aegis of this Department is not immediately available. The Department will survey relevant units and a full reply will issue as soon as possible. I have also requested the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy. Details for other bodies under the aegis of the Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned and the Deputy should contact the relevant Director/CEO/Registrar directly.

Brexit Issues

281. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17004/17]

282. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17020/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 281 and 282 together.

The Deputy Secretary, Policy and Strategy Division, and the Assistant Secretary, R&D and Health Analytics Division are the lead officials in my Department for planning and coordination on the negotiations for Brexit. The Department of Health participates fully in the Senior Officials Group on EU Affairs, the Interdepartmental Group on EU/UK Affairs, and its work groups established to support the Cabinet Committee on Brexit.

The Department established a Management Board Subcommittee on Brexit in advance of the UK referendum, to examine the implications of a decision to leave the EU. The Subcommittee is chaired at senior level and made up of representatives from across the Department, as well as from the HSE, which is represented at National Director level. In addition to the Management Board sub-committee, an Interdepartmental/Inter-agency Group, chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the Primary Care Division, has been established to prepare a bid for the relocation of the European Medicines Agency on foot of a Government Decision at the end of October 2016.

Brexit raises many issues across a wide range of areas that need to be addressed. Work on each specific issue will be led by the line Units with policy responsibility. Units have built up the necessary expertise and contacts with their UK and EU counterparts over time to enable them to examine and address the implications of Brexit in their area. In this way, work on Brexit-related issues is being mainstreamed throughout the Department. The work of individual Units on Brexit is brought together by the Department's Management Board sub-committee on Brexit.

Within my Department, International and Research Policy Unit provides a coordinating function in relation to Brexit just as it does for other international matters and North-South cooperation. The Department has a full-time EU health attaché stationed in the Permanent Representation in Brussels, who is in regular contact with International and Research Policy Unit and other Units throughout the Department. Resources allocated to Brexit in my Department are kept under ongoing review.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

283. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the name of the newly appointed consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma in St. Vincent's University Hospital and the start date for taking up the position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17038/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Medical Card Data

284. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures of the average annual cost of a medical card; if he will provide a breakdown of the areas of spend, for example, GP, drugs and hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17040/17]

285. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of discretionary medical cards held currently or the latest figure available; the number held at its peak; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17041/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 285 together.

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.

Patient Transport

286. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if patients using a private ambulance service for essential transfer to outpatient appointments can avail of a reimbursement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17042/17]

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

Health Products Regulatory Authority

287. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if resources are being devoted specifically to investigate and intervene in the sale of real and counterfeit pregabalin; if the source of these substances has been discovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17047/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the statutory agency responsible for the regulation of human and veterinary medicines in Ireland. The HPRA has an enforcement section dedicated to investigation of instances of the illicit sale of medicines and other health products, including the illicit sale of genuine and counterfeit/falsified pregabalin containing medicines. The HPRA cooperates with An Garda Síochána and Revenue's Customs Service in the investigation of offences under the Irish Medicines Board Acts 1995 and 2006.

Pregabalin is the active ingredient in a prescription only medicine that is indicated for treatment of generalised anxiety disorder in adults, pain due to nerve damage and as part of the treatment for epilepsy. Pregabalin is known to be subject to potential abuse. As for any prescription medicine, the HPRA advises that a pregabalin containing medicine should only be taken following a consultation with a registered medical practitioner and dispensing by a registered pharmacy. Prescription only medicines purchased from unauthorised sources cannot be relied on for their safety, effectiveness or quality. They may be falsified and may create a risk to the health of the consumer. The HPRA is continuing to work with An Garda Síochána, Revenue's Customs Service and other agencies abroad in order to curtail and, where possible, halt the illicit sale and supply of prescription medicines, including those containing pregabalin.

The HPRA has informed me that during 2016, a total of 1,174 tablets of Pregabalin containing medicines were detained by the Authority. These were supplied from the following countries:

- 940 from India
- 180 from China
- 50 from Hong Kong
- 4 from Singapore.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

288. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if DPS, drugs payment scheme, patients must pay the DPS amount of €144 only 11 times per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17051/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

289. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the approach taken by DPS, drugs payment scheme, pharmacists when a patient runs out of medication before the calendar month

is up; if there are instances where patients must pay €144 twice in one month; if this is taken into account at the end of the year in cases where patients could have made up to 14 monthly payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17052/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

290. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17061/17]

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.

HIQA Inspections

291. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the details of all HIQA examinations, visits, reports and recommendations into a nursing home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17064/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to monitor safety and quality and drive improvement in Ireland's health and personal social care services. Since 2009 all nursing homes have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

Once finalised, HIQA inspection reports are published on the Authority's website www.hiqa.ie.

Nursing Home Subventions

292. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to a nursing home (details supplied) in each of the years 2008 to 2015 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17065/17]

293. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a request for increased funding from a nursing home (details supplied); if he will provide extra funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17066/17]

294. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide additional funding to enable a nursing home (details supplied) comply with HIQA recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17067/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 292 to 294, inclusive, together.

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

Medical Card Reviews

295. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a decision to revoke a medical card from a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be reviewed in view of evidence having been supplied that supports claims by the card holder that every effort was made to engage with his Department and supply it with the required information concerning the holder's place of residence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17084/17]

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.

Heritage Schemes

296. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is grant aid available to renovate traditional farm buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17054/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme provides grant-aid for the conservation of traditional farm buildings and related structures on GLAS farms. This Scheme is administered by The Heritage Council on behalf of my Department and seeks to ensure that traditional farm buildings and structures are restored and conserved for renewed practical agricultural use as part of the normal working life of the farm.

While my Department has no similar scheme in respect of traditional farm buildings on non-GLAS farms, I am aware that The Heritage Council operates a broadly based 'Heritage Management Grant Scheme' that is open to all, and which may provide some opportunities for non-GLAS farmers. In addition, The Revenue Commissioners, in conjunction with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, allow tax relief for expenditure on works of repair, maintenance or restoration to approved historic properties and gardens, which can be a very significant assistance to qualifying farms. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, through the local authorities, also provide assistance for appropriate conservation work to eligible structures in respect of buildings contained on the Record of Protected Structures and in Architectural Conservation Areas.

Aquaculture Licences

297. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to prevent unregulated aquaculture on Lough Foyle, County Donegal, while awaiting the jurisdictional issues to be resolved with the Crown estates; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [16884/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The management of aquaculture licensing functions in Lough Foyle gives rise to legal and jurisdictional complexities. Negotiations regarding the jurisdiction of the Lough Foyle area are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. I understand these negotiations are ongoing.

My Department organises and participates in an inter-departmental working group which is pursuing a way forward in terms of the future management of aquaculture activities on Lough Foyle, in parallel with a workable resolution to the complex jurisdictional issues involved.

GLAS Payments

298. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16940/17]

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.

Payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year has now been approved and processing of the payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year will now commence with a view to issuing payment at the earliest possible date.

GLAS Payments

299. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in a 2016 GLAS payment issuing to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16941/17]

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

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Parcels approved into the GLAS scheme for the Farmland Habitat action have been merged since the GLAS application was submitted which has resulted in unforeseen technical issues on the Department's databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2016 payment as soon as possible.

Teagasc Courses

300. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons Teagasc has trained to provide health and safety tutorials; the number of persons that have been trained in health and safety by Teagasc that are over 65 years of age; the amount of money allotted to Teagasc to carry out this training; and when they have been accredited by Teagasc to provide health and safety training, the way in which these persons are evaluated to ensure the course they provide is being taught effectively. [16952/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The matters raised are operational issues for Teagasc.

Teagasc integrates occupational health and safety (OHS) strongly into its Research and Knowledge Transfer Programmes. The Teagasc OHS programme seeks to assist farmers to effectively manage this dimension of operating a farm. All major Teagasc events have an OHS exhibit, and the topic is strongly emphasised in newsletters, media releases and articles in Teagasc publications. Teagasc advisors provide advice on OHS at events (e.g. farm walks, discussion groups) and during farm advisory visits. Research is currently in progress related to farmer OHS adoption and farmers' health.

I am advised by Teagasc that 38 staff members are trained to provide OHS training to farmers related to the HSA Code of Practice for Preventing Injury and Occupational Ill Health in Agriculture incorporating a Farm Safety, Code of Practice - Risk Assessment Document. The 38 staff have a Quality Qualification Ireland (QQI) Level 5 (or higher) qualification in OHS or meet HSA specifications for delivery training on the Farm Safety, Code of Practice – Risk Assessment.

Teagasc does not record farmer age for OHS training, however, previous research indicates that roughly a third of farmers who completed the Farm Safety, Code of Practice - Risk Assessment Document were over 65 years old. I understand that research undertaken by Teagasc among participants in OHS training shows that 98% found the training worthwhile and would recommend it to other farmers.

Teagasc is funded by my Department to provide research, advisory and training services to the agricultural sector. The grant allocation for 2017 is in excess of €128m. The allocation of funding to particular services is an operational matter for Teagasc. I understand that because Teagasc work in the OHS area is fully integrated in its education and training, advisory and research work, it does not have estimates of the OHS component cost.

Teagasc are also contracted to deliver health and safety training under my Department's Knowledge Transfer Programme to approximately 500 approved Knowledge Transfer Facilitators. Approximately 250 of such approved Knowledge Transfer Facilitators are directly employed by Teagasc. This training provides them with the skill to complete the health and safety component of the Farm Improvement Plan with the farmer participants in the programme.

Additionally all participants of the Teagasc Green Cert programme complete the mandatory Teagasc Farm Safety course workbook and the HSA, Farm Safety, Code of Practice - Risk Assessment Document.

GLAS Applications

301. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason some persons are having difficulty applying online for BPS due to the ongoing GLAS problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16967/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is aware of the fact that, in a limited number of cases, details of individual GLAS applications are not yet visible when they log onto the Department's on-line BPS applications facility.

Staff in my Department are aware of this issue and it is expected that it will be resolved shortly

GLAS Applications

302. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he plans to take to rectify the issue which some persons are having where they are having difficulty applying online for BPS due to the ongoing GLAS problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16968/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is aware of the fact that, in a limited number of cases, details of individual GLAS applications are not yet visible when they log onto the Department's on-line BPS applications facility.

Staff in my Department are aware of this issue and it is expected that it will be resolved shortly.

Consultancy Contracts Data

303. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16977/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to inform the Deputy that the information requested is an operational matter for the State bodies themselves. They have been requested to forward the relevant information directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Brexit Issues

304. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16995/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Unit within its EU and International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a newly formed Brexit and International Trade Division. It comprises of three staff working full-time on Brexit issues, reporting to a full-time Head of Division, who in turn reports to an Assistant Secretary General deeply engaged in Brexit issues in addition to discharging other responsibilities. The Unit co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach.

My Department will continuously assess resources required as the Brexit Process continues.

Brexit Issues

305. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17011/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Unit within its EU and International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a newly formed Brexit and International Trade Division. It comprises of three staff working full-time on Brexit issues, reporting to a full-time Head of Division, who in turn reports to an Assistant Secretary General deeply engaged in Brexit issues in addition to discharging other responsibilities. The Unit co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Food Industry Development

306. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions his Department are undertaking to increase the levels of innovation in food processing; his views on a person's (details supplied) opinion that levels of innovation in this sector are low; his views on whether the State is falling behind on this ahead of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17046/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Innovation is an important cross cutting theme of the Food Wise 2025 strategy and is crucial to achieving the future sustainable development of the sector, particularly in view of the challenges arising from Brexit. Food Wise identified gaps in translating research into products and practice, and in industry capacity to absorb new research. The Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), which I chair, reviews progress on Food Wise and has agreed that as well as providing technical supports for innovation, innovation needs to be embedded as a core value by food companies themselves, and staff need to be equipped to manage innovation.

My Department and relevant agencies are providing significant supports for innovation. Between 2010 and 2016 my Department provided funding of over €65m, on a competitive basis, to higher education and other public research institutes for food related research through the Food Institutional Research Measure (FIRM). One of the main areas funded is 'Food Processing Technology and Engineering' where funding amounted to c. €20.5m for 35 collaborative inter-institutional research projects during the period. A further €20m was invested to support research in 38 projects under the areas of 'Functional Food & Health' and 'Food Product Development, Formulation and Sensory Science' and, in addition, another €9.8m was funded in the area of 'Food Chain Integrity and Safety'.

A key output of FIRM is to train early stage researchers at PhD and postdoctoral level in the specialist skills relevant to the Irish food sector, providing a pipeline of skilled scientists ready to take up RDI positions in the food processing industry. My Department also funds the Agrifood and Forestry Graduate Development Programme (AFGDP) which equips newly

trained researchers with transferable managerial skills needed for smooth entry into the food industry. My Department also supports agriculture and food themed projects that prove successful in competitive Calls under the Irish Research Council's Employment-Based Post Graduate programme. These competitive supports are guided by the 'SHARP' strategic research and innovation agenda drawn up by a DAFM-led cross-funder Working Group under the National Research Prioritisation Exercise and assisted by an industry-led broad stakeholder research advisory group hosted by my Department.

A key recommendation of Food Wise was a greater focus on consumer insights in driving future investment in research, development and innovation. This recommendation has been followed by Bord Bia in establishing "The Thinking House", an innovative and industry-focused centre dedicated to bringing insights from consumers, often in distant markets, back to Irish food producers to inform product formulation, development and marketing. Some 80% of New Product Development fails due to lack of consumer insight. The team at the Thinking House already work with over 100 manufacturers embedding the principles of design innovation and insight to build business and partnerships with multi-national players. The Thinking House also aims to close the gap between research and consumer needs, leading to better value for money and greater return on investment for R&D centres and promotion of an interdisciplinary approach to solving marketing questions by working with academia to overcome the barriers they face.

Innovation and entrepreneurship can be closely linked. Food Works, an entrepreneurship initiative by Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc, centres on start-up businesses with the potential to scale up quickly and make an impact internationally. A survey in 2016 found that 60% of Food Works alumni are trading, with 32% involved in exports.

Enterprise Ireland has supported the innovation agenda with a targeted focus on supporting food and beverage clients to enhance their competitiveness and innovative capability. My Department funds Enterprise Ireland innovation vouchers and lean competitiveness programmes in relation to food and beverage companies. Enterprise Ireland also support R&D direct company funding and technology centres and have developed an Innovation 4 Growth Programme to assist companies to diversity into new products and Innovation Partnership funding (third level and company collaboration). A third Innovation4Growth programme is due to commence in the second half of this year.

The Dairy Processing Technology Centre (DPTC) is a €25m investment supported by the Department of Jobs through Enterprise Ireland and the dairy industry partners and will be hosted by the University of Limerick.

Teagasc and dairy industry shareholders are investing €10 million in the expansion of the Moorepark Technology Ltd (MTL) pilot plant facility in Fermoy Co. Cork. This will provide a platform to support the ambitions of the dairy industry to produce value added foods and ingredients for international markets.

The "Meat Technology Centre" is a virtual centre hosted in Ashtown, Teagasc. Composed of 9 leading Irish meat companies and 4 Research Organisations (Teagasc, DIT, UCC and ICBF) it will benefit from an €8m investment over 5 years is €8m made up of contributions from Enterprise Ireland and the meat industry.

In overall terms, Teagasc annual spend on research is some €68m. Teagasc, working in conjunction with other national development agencies, provides a comprehensive support service for the food processing industry with a particular focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-up food businesses.

The strategic aims of the Teagasc Food Programme are to increase the level of scientific innovation in Ireland's food processing sector, to support innovation, growth and export capability in food industries, to improve and develop the safe and clean image of Irish food products and to ensure viable technology transfer from Teagasc research programmes to industry.

Teagasc provides product development supports to all sectors and sizes of food businesses, with a special emphasis on SMEs, high innovation potential early stage and start-up businesses. A wide range of modern food processing facilities and equipment is available to food businesses at both Teagasc Ashtown and Teagasc Moorepark. An ultra-modern pilot plant, Moorepark Technology Ltd. (MTL), contains the most up-to-date and versatile pilot scale processing equipment.

Teagasc is hosting the Meat Technology Centre (MTC), a collaborative entity with industry and resourced by highly qualified researchers who will undertake market focused strategic research programmes for the benefit of the meat industry. The MTC will fuel growth in the Irish beef and sheep meat sector by creating and commercialising a pipeline of science and technology based innovations, leading to enhanced processes and product development.

In the speciality food area, The Cheese Institute has been designed by Bord Bia and Teagasc and is aimed at both start-ups and current industry operators. Specifically tailored to the farmhouse and speciality cheese industry, the initiative includes production methods, operational capability, market insight, know-how for transition to larger scale businesses and viewing trends and opportunities.

In relation to seafood, in particular, Bord Iascaigh Mhara has a Centre in Clonakilty and is undertaking a two year study on the sector to better understand the innovation needs of the industry and benchmark it internationally.

While this represents a considerable programme of work and investment, the challenges facing the agrifood sector following the UK decision to leave the European Union are unique and retaining and diversifying markets will require industry, academia, state bodies and Departments to work closely together to ensure that all continue to focus on innovation, to identify what works best and to succeed in making innovation an integral part of the development of the agrifood sector and of its direct and indirect contribution nationally and regionally.

GLAS Payments

307. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17124/17]

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 only land included in the application is commonage land.

During the 2015 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 in respect of the 2015 scheme year with a view to issuing payment as soon as possible. Once the 2015 payment has issued processing in respect of the 2016 scheme year will be finalised.

TAMS Payments

308. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a TAMS II payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17140/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It is a matter for the applicant and their advisor to ensure that the tax clearance status of the contractors being used are in order before the work commences. The application for a TAMS II payment referred to has been received and is currently being examined in the local office concerned.

Recycling Policy

309. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider introducing the paying of a deposit for plastic bottles to encourage recycling and deal with the amount of bottles being discarded around the countryside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16882/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Repak is the approved producer responsibility compliance scheme for packaging in Ireland and is tasked with meeting recovery and recycling targets established under the EU Packaging Directive (94/62/EC). The most recent Waste Packaging Statistics for Ireland published by the EPA in May 2016 show that Ireland has met and exceeded the overall packaging waste recovery rate and the recycling rate targets since they came into force. In July 2014, the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government published a Review of the Producer Responsibility Initiative Model in Ireland. The aim of the review was to assess the nature and level of the challenges which are currently facing the existing Producer Responsibility Agreements, as well as the forthcoming challenges that are expected to arise in the management of various waste streams. A stakeholder consultation process was also conducted.

As part of this review, a wider examination of issues within the packaging sphere was undertaken and consideration was given to the introduction of a bring back scheme for waste, including plastic bottles. The review was asked to consider, among other matters, an examination of packaging reduction initiatives such as deposit and refund and reverse vending.

The review report did not recommend the introduction of a Deposit and Refund scheme and concluded that to establish such a scheme was inappropriate, in view of the operation of the existing packaging scheme (operated by Repak), and policies concerning household waste collection, plus the high administrative costs of introducing such a system. It is also conceivable that littering could occur where waste bins might be searched for items attracting a refund under any such scheme.

The review report is available at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Environment/Waste/WasteManagement/FileDownload%2C34038%2Cen.pdf>

Better Energy Homes Scheme Applications

310. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a SEAI grant for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17126/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) under the Better Energy Programme. Better Energy Homes provides a financial incentive to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating systems upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER).

Decisions in relation to individual grant applications are an operational matter for the SEAI and I understand that they are in contact with the applicant.

A dedicated hotline to deal with questions about applications is available at 1800 250 204. In addition, the SEAI has established a specific email address for queries from Oireachtas members: oireachtas@seai.ie. Such queries will be dealt with promptly.

Alternative Energy Projects

311. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which natural energy resources continue to be developed and made available to the public here and counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16924/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has calculated that 25.3% of electricity, 6.5% of heat and 5.7% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2015. Provisional data for 2016 from SEAI shows that 26.2% of electricity demand was met from renewable sources. The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and although good progress towards the target has been made to date, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), designed to assist in meeting our RES-E targets, out to 2030.

The first Technology Review public consultation on the proposed new RESS was published in 2015 and following the completion of detailed economic analysis on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting a range of renewable technologies, including solar and wind, a second public consultation will be published in the first half of this year. Details of the next public consultation will be advertised on the Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

The new RESS will provide pathways for delivering on the 2015 Energy White Paper commitment to ensure communities and citizens are at the centre of the future energy transition in Ireland. Communities are effectively being designed into the fabric of the new scheme with policy measures to incentivise community-led and developer-led community projects being assessed. As part of the design of this new scheme, a national workshop on community participation in renewable energy projects was held in Portlaoise on February 2 2017.

Drafting of a Geothermal Bill by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel is ongoing.

Consultancy Contracts Data

312. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years, 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16980/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Brexit Issues

313. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16998/17]

314. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17014/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 313 and 314 together.

The Government's Brexit Contingency Framework sets out that all Departments should identify a senior official to oversee Brexit matters and to create a Top Management sub-committee to deal specifically with the implications of Brexit for their areas of work.

My Department nominated the Assistant Secretary for Energy to take lead responsibility for Brexit matters. Under the chairmanship of this Assistant Secretary a sub-committee, consisting of Principal Officers representing policy areas with potential Brexit implications in my Department, has been convened.

This sub-committee has representatives from ten divisions reflecting the broad remit of my Department, with further officials being invited as required. The sub-committee meets regularly to ensure that my Department is prepared for the possible implications of Brexit. I would also add that I as Minister participate in the Cabinet committee on Brexit and my Department is also represented on the Interdepartmental Brexit Group. This ensures a 'whole of Government' approach when dealing with Brexit.

Brexit is a standing item on the Agenda of my Department's Management Board which generally meets weekly and which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department. It is also on the Agenda of my monthly meetings with the Management Board which examines progress on priority issues being addressed by the Department.

Energy has been identified as a key priority for my Department and Government in the Brexit negotiations. As a result, the Strategic Energy Policy Division - consisting of six staff - has taken a leading role in coordinating all Brexit work across my Department.

The work on Brexit to date has been funded from existing budgets including the All Island Brexit Civic Dialogue on Energy on 6 February in Boyle, Co. Roscommon which had a total cost of €3,590.70. Given the uncertainty in relation to Brexit, it is not practicable to provide an estimate of the future cost at this time.

Ministerial Meetings

315. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on his meetings with the chief executives and boards of CIE, Irish Rail, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann since 1 September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16830/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Since the 1st of September, I have met with the Chairs of each of the CIÉ companies on the following dates -

- Córas Iompair Éireann: 5 December 2016
- Bus Átha Cliath: 16 September 2016
- Bus Éireann: 12 September, 5 December 2016 and 12 January 2017
- Iarnród Éireann: 8 September and 16 December 2016

Prior to the 1st of September I also met with the Chair of CIÉ on 4 July and the Chair of Bus Átha Cliath on 30 August. At some of these meetings the CEOs would also have been present.

In addition to these meetings I am of course briefed by my Department on any relevant issues which arise during the course of normal administrative and corporate governance related contact between my Department and the companies in question.

Bus Éireann

316. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the financial position of Bus Éireann since 2010; if some of Bus Éireann cash reserves were transferred in this period to other companies in the CIE semi-state group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16832/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the annual audited accounts for Bus Éireann are available on the Company's website, and provide full disclosure on their financial position in each financial year.

In the period 2010 to 2012/13 the Company experienced declining passenger numbers and revenues; however, in recent years the Company has seen increased passenger numbers and revenues on its PSO services but the Company's smaller network of commercial Expressway services is continuing to experience significant challenges. These challenges are impacting on the Company's overall financial position and in its last set of audited accounts for 2015 the Company recorded a deficit of €6 million.

In relation to the query regarding cash reserves, this is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Network

317. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the section of the N40 from the Jack Lynch tunnel to junction number 01 at the N22 is subject to a yield right of way rule obligatory in law under Statutory Instrument 182 of 1997 Regulation 8(8) [16834/17]

318. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if section 11 of the RSA Rules of the Road on motorways and tunnels apply when prefaced by the word must outlined in red in those rules and which cover cars assessing and driving on the motorway in relation to the N40 from the Jack Lynch tunnel to junction number 01 at the N22; and if these rules are amenable to the law under a particular statutory instrument. [16835/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 317 and 318 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. This also applies to the maintenance and management of national roads and includes the provision of signs and road markings.

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.

Brexit Issues

319. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he has taken to engaging with the tourism sector here to identifying and offset the negative impact of Brexit and the triggering of Article 50 throughout Ireland and especially in regards to counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16919/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In common with the rest of Government there has been deep analysis of the challenges which all industries and commercial sectors, including the tourism industry, will face as a result of the outcome of the UK Referendum. There are several inter-departmental groups, each with a specific focus, preparing for Brexit and there has been significant engagement with industry and civic society. These engagements are informing the Government's analysis, research and preparations.

On 23 January Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan and I hosted an All-Island Dialogue on the impact of Brexit on the tourism and hospitality sector in Dundalk. The feedback from tourism industry participants at the event reaffirmed the Government's analysis in relation to the implications of Brexit for tourism and I am committed to an on-going dialogue with the tourism and hospitality industry as the Brexit negotiations proceed.

Overseas tourism marketing, regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion are operational matters for the boards and management of the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to both Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Bus Services

320. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16958/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wrote to the National Director of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland (CTTC) on 10 March to advise him of the proposal to use a legislative remedy to rectify this specific matter in view of the difficulties being faced by the operator affected.

Amendment regulations are being finalised to help resolve this matter and I am advised that it is expected to submit amendment regulations for my signature shortly.

Industrial Disputes

321. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if holders of annual bus tickets with Bus Éireann will have their payments refunded for the days for which there has been no services available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16959/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Company's website has information regarding refunds due to industrial action under its "Customer Services / Bus Éireann FAQ" section.

As the issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have also forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Industrial Disputes

322. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he has taken to date to assist in the resolution of the strike at Bus Éireann and to address workers' concerns. [16969/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have consistently stated that I will not dictate to management and unions about their internal issues and nor will I become involved in discussions about how the Company organises itself in terms of its work practices etc. These are issues which require agreement between management and unions.

However, in those areas where I believe it to be appropriate to act, I have acted.

- I have increased the amount of money available to fund the delivery of PSO services, including those PSO bus services delivered by Bus Éireann. Last year the Company received 21% more in PSO funding than 2015 and this year overall funding for the PSO programme has increased by a further 11%.

- I have committed toward further increases to the PSO funding programme as resources allow.

- I have instructed my Department to work with the Department of Social Protection in examining the levels of funding associated with the Free Travel Scheme; and

- I have supported the NTA in fulfilling its statutory role in assessing the transport connectivity needs of communities impacted by changes to commercial bus services.

5 April 2017

My actions alone cannot, and will not, resolve this dispute however. Resolution will require agreement between management and unions in relation to tackling those inefficiencies which both parties have agreed exist within the Company.

I welcome the fact that both parties have accepted an invitation from the WRC to recommence discussions. I hope that all involved can use this opportunity to agree upon an acceptable and fair deal. The travelling public will expect that the parties can come to an agreement that allows for an end to this recent period of disruption to transport services.

Road Network

323. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding driving licence application forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16972/17]

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

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

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

Consultancy Contracts Data

324. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of his Department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16992/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is a matter for agencies themselves. Your query will be forwarded to the agencies under my Department's remit for direct response to you. If you do not get a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Departmental Information

325. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17010/17]

326. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17026/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 325 and 326 together.

Brexit has the potential to have serious adverse economic transport and tourism impacts and as a result has been identified as the main strategic risk facing the Department. The Department in response has organised itself internally and while all relevant areas of the Department are actively engaged in Brexit related work and consultation with stakeholders, overall responsibility for the preparation and coordination of its response to Brexit has been assigned to the Head of Function of its EU Coordination Unit.

Brexit issues relating to Tourism are managed by the Head of Function of the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division.

Both Heads of Function are Principal Officers. The support teams who deal with Brexit issues in addition to other duties are 3 staff in EU Coordination Unit and 3 staff on the tourism side.

The Management Board has, and will continue, to keep under review the Department's internal organisation and structures for Brexit to ensure that they remain robust in addressing the evolving Brexit situation. The need for additional funding for Brexit related matters is also under review.

Tourism Promotion

327. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional resources are being devoted to encourage tourism in order to counteract the drop in tourism from the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17048/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In common with the rest of Government there has been deep analysis of the challenges which industry and the commercial sectors, including the tourism industry, faces because of the outcome of the UK Referendum. Even prior to the referendum result, there was a commitment in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" to prioritising tourism marketing efforts towards those markets providing higher revenue returns. The Programme for Government commits to implementing the policy objectives in the policy statement and achieving the targets for Irish tourism contained therein. The triggering of Article 50 does not change this. A key element of Tourism Ireland's strategy since 2014 has been market diversification. In 2017, Tourism Ireland will continue to implement its market diversification strategy and intends to maximise holiday revenue through investment in Mainland Europe and North America. In addition the depreciation of sterling against the euro since the UK referendum means that value for money will be a key message for Tourism Ireland in Britain this year. Looking to the medium term, Tourism Ireland's plan for the period from 2017-2019 includes the agency's response to marketing Ireland in a more focussed manner in Great Britain to ensure maximum value for marketing spend. Many factors will influence the impact Brexit has on Ireland's tourism performance in overseas markets, much of which is outside of our control. However, restoring Ireland's share of voice in the overseas market is within our control and the Tourism Action Plan 2016 -2018 commits to restoring overseas tourism marketing funds to pre-recession levels on a phased basis.

State Airports

328. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cause of

5 April 2017

the downgrading of Shannon Airport; the economic impacts for the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17050/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Shannon Airport Authority (SAA), a subsidiary of Shannon Group plc, has statutory responsibility for the management and operation of Shannon Airport and as such the issue raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the company. That said, SAA is conscious of the need to control its costs so that it can remain competitive and continue to attract new airline business in an increasingly competitive international marketplace. In this regard, one of the proposals that the company has had initial discussions with staff and union representatives is to operate at Category 9 on a flexible basis rather than operate permanently at that level, 24/7, all year 'round. This would contribute to a more efficient operating model at the airport without any material impact on flight operations. I understand that this arrangement will arise in any event, at nighttimes, for a temporary period of about 26 weeks as a consequence of the resurfacing of the main runway at Shannon which is due to get underway on 25th April next.

I have forwarded the Question to SAA for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

Traffic Data

329. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent data available to his Department on the cost of traffic congestion to the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17076/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In recognition of the growing body of evidence emerging of increased travel demand across the Dublin region in particular, my Department's economic and financial evaluation unit has undertaken a research project to estimate the cost of aggravated congestion across Ireland's transport system. Aggravated congestion occurs when the number of vehicles on a part of the network is higher than the network can handle and the point at which serious traffic delays arise. The first phase of the project, which is currently being finalised estimates the annual value of time lost to road users due to aggravated congestion in the greater Dublin area. The study uses data from a variety of sources to estimate activity on the network including census travel to work data, NTA GDA surveys, car ownership data and CSO small area population statistics. The project has been carried out in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, NTA, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, and Dublin City Council, DCC, with particular support from the NTA's modelling team in producing the modelled outputs.

A final project report will be published on my Department's website in the coming weeks. However, I understand that the analysis undertaken for the report estimates that the cost of time lost due to aggravated congestion is currently €350 million per annum and is forecasted to rise to €2 billion per annum in 2033. This work is an important consideration in formulating my overall approach to tackling congestion in the short to medium term and forms a key part of the case for increased public transport investment, as part of the mid-term review of the Government's capital plan in 2017.

Public Service Obligation Services

330. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the PSO, public service obligation, air tender service between Donegal and Dublin and Kerry

and Dublin; the dates the current PSO contracts were awarded and to which airline; the expiry date of the current PSO contract; the daily service frequency timetable from Monday to Sunday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17079/17]

331. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details for the annual passenger numbers carried, average annual fare and annual PSO payments for each route from 2014 to 2016 in counties Donegal and Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17080/17]

332. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to renew the PSO air tender services for Donegal-Dublin and Kerry-Dublin on expiration of the current tender period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17081/17]

333. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are other PSO air tender routes being considered by his department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17082/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330 to 333, inclusive, together.

The Public Service Obligation, PSO, air services regime operates in accordance with EU Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1008/2008.

The current contract to provide PSO air services between Dublin and the airports in Donegal and Kerry was awarded to Stobart Air and signed on 23 December 2014 following an EU public procurement process conducted by my Department. This three-year contract operates from 1 February 2015 until 31 January 2018 and provides for two daily return flights on each route. The daily timetables are available on the airports' websites *donegalairport.ie* and *kerryairport.ie*.

It is an EU requirement that the continuing justification for any PSO services is reviewed prior to tendering again for such services and my Department is aiming to conduct this review by mid-year. Subject to the outcome of that review, the tender process will commence in the second half of the year to ensure continuity of services in 2018. There are no proposals to establish PSO air services on any additional routes.

Details of annual passenger numbers and PSO contractual payments from 2014 to 2016 are provided in the table below.

The PSO contract provides that at least 80% of the contracted minimum daily seat capacity on each route be available at a fare, inclusive of airport charges, not exceeding €80 each way. Fares in relation to the balance of available seats may be determined by the carrier.

Annual PSO Passenger Numbers

-	2014	2015	2016
Donegal/Dublin	22,022	24,460	31,014
Kerry/Dublin	37,303	44,489	46,340

PSO Payments

-	2014 ²	2015 ¹	2016 ¹
Donegal/Dublin	€3.75m		
Kerry/Dublin	€4.06m	€7.53m	€7.60m

¹One contract for both services. Figures are for first year of contract 1 February 2015–31

January 2016 and for second year of contract 1 February 2016– 31 January 2017.

²Figures are for equivalent period in 2014, namely 1 February 2014 – 31 January 2015.

Brexit Issues

334. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the provisions being made with regard to issues arising post-Brexit (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16908/17]

335. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in view of the negative impact of Brexit and the triggering of Article 50 on investment and jobs here and especially in the Border region and counties Sligo and Leitrim, the steps she will take to ensure that adequate provision is made to counter the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16909/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 334 and 335 together.

Brexit has been on our radar for a number of years and we have been planning accordingly.

In order for me, as Minister with responsibility for supporting business across all sectors, to develop initiatives to support businesses that are impacted by Brexit, I need to fully understand business needs and to understand the various scenarios that may confront us.

In this regard, my officials are currently analysing the outputs from a series of structured engagements with companies of different sizes, across different sectors and across the regions on the impact of currency fluctuations on exposed companies.

The information gathered during the course of this engagement is detailed and informative and when fully analysed will give me a clear indication of the needs of SMEs to help them address the short and more medium and long term challenges of Brexit.

I recently hosted a Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Brexit Stakeholder Engagement Event in Carrick-On-Shannon on 30 January, attended by over two hundred Departmental stakeholders – with significant attendance from the local business community. This provided a valuable opportunity to hear from companies and stakeholders about the impact of Brexit on their businesses

My Department is also funding a number of research projects to:

- improve our understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit;

- provide data on the extent and concentration of cross border trade, including information on this trade by product and firm types and barriers to trade;

- examine the implications for the most exposed enterprise sectors - in terms of trading and economic relationships - of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union.

In terms of my Agencies, Enterprise Ireland has been systematically engaging with its 1,500 clients that export to the UK. EI will continue to provide continued supports to its client companies who now directly employ over 201,000 jobs across the country.

IDA Ireland is constantly engaged with clients across its entire portfolio and in the months leading up to the UK referendum it engaged with clients and prospective clients in relation to the potential impact of Brexit. The IDA has a Team involved in strategic scenario planning, which continues to work on ensuring that the Agency's strategy is fit for purpose in light of the referendum results in the UK.

The Local Enterprise Offices are a key resource for the micro and small business sector, particularly in the regions. I have obtained an additional Capital allocation of €4m for Local Enterprise Development in 2017, which will be used to implement a series of Brexit-related measures in the LEOs.

IDA, EI, and the LEOs are making a significant contribution to employment in Sligo and Leitrim.

There are currently 27 multinational companies employing over 2,700 people in these counties.

EI companies currently support 1,546 and 922 jobs in Sligo and Leitrim respectively. EI job announcements in 2016 in the North West included LotusWorks (50 jobs in Sligo) and VistaMed (200 jobs in Leitrim).

The Sligo and Leitrim LEOs are fully engaged in supporting the micro-enterprise and small business sectors in their areas to create and sustain jobs. In 2016, the number of jobs that were created by micro-enterprises that had been supported by LEO Sligo and LEO Leitrim were 38 and 44 respectively.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative is a concrete example of the targeted approach we are undertaking to boost regional employment. While the Regions will benefit from our wider Brexit responses, the implications of the Brexit vote and the challenges and opportunities that the decision pose for specific Regions has been discussed at the meetings of the Implementation Committees for the Regional Action Plan for Jobs that have taken place since the June decision.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is stimulating job creation across the region, by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector, and through the provision of new competitive funds awarded through Enterprise Ireland, to support regional enterprise projects. The Plan aims to support the creation of 28,000 jobs across Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth by 2020. Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agrifood, manufacturing/engineering and tourism.

I will continue to visit the regions and meet with stakeholders to ensure that plans are being implemented in every region, including the Border region.

Job Creation

336. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to attract foreign direct investment and indigenous investment to the manufacturing and service sectors here, in view of the triggering of Article 50 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16910/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): At the strategic level, Enterprise 2025 sets out the roadmap for enterprise development, and details

the actions required and being taken to support the manufacturing and service sectors. Our new trade and investment strategy, Ireland Connected, will be backed up by increasing our agency resources both at home and overseas and an intensified programme of trade missions.

Responding to Brexit, which has particular implications for border counties, has also been prioritised in the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 which sets out 20 specific actions aimed at growing and diversifying markets for Irish exports and maximise opportunities in foreign direct investment and research and innovation.

In addition to protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process, maintaining the Common Travel Area, and influencing the future of the European Union, we have made it a priority to minimise the impact of Brexit on Ireland's trade and on our economy. Supporting the development and growth of indigenous companies and maximising Foreign Direct investment are key activities of my Department and Agencies.

Almost 50 additional staff are being deployed by my Agencies to support firms to enter new markets and to attract new investment.

Enterprise Ireland is working with firms to support product and service innovation, the adoption of lean systems, smarter sourcing strategies and, crucially, the identification of new overseas markets. Enterprise Ireland will shortly launch its new Eurozone strategy, with the aim of increasing indigenous exports to the Eurozone by 50% over the period to 2020. In addition, we are engaging with companies to help them adapt to currency fluctuations and to support product and market diversification. The Local Enterprise Offices are working with non-EI client companies providing support and advice services as well as bespoke services to foster new business opportunities in local areas.

IDA continues to identify potential for mobile FDI in key sectors and actively pursue these opportunities including through targeted trade missions and roll-out of advertising campaigns to promote Ireland's offering.

My Department is currently undertaking research to examine the implications at firm-level for the most exposed enterprise sectors of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union. This research will inform an assessment of the way in which Brexit will affect individual sectors of the economy and our targeted response. I am also engaging with stakeholders across the country to assess the implications for different regions and sectors. On 30 January, I hosted a major stakeholder event in Carrick-on-Shannon to facilitate a dialogue with stakeholders about the impacts, challenges and opportunities arising as a result of the UK decision to leave the EU, across the broad range of policy areas for which the Department is responsible.

Further, my Department is also funding a project through InterTrade Ireland on the North-South trade implications of Brexit. This project will provide an understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit.

Job Creation

337. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to make contact with prospective investors inside and outside the European Union with a view to ensuring a strong and vibrant economy post-Brexit and the triggering of Article 50 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16911/17]

338. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the

steps she is taking to continue to encourage and avail of job creation opportunities based on innovation and technology here and especially in regards to counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16912/17]

339. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to continue to compete for foreign direct investment with particular reference to job relocation arising from Brexit and the triggering of Article 50 here and especially in the Border region and counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16913/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 337 to 339, inclusive, together.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) remains a key contributor to Ireland's continuing economic development and growth. The role it plays in sustaining employment here is well-documented, with approximately one out of every five private sector jobs here directly or indirectly resulting from FDI. Last year saw the highest ever level of employment in IDA Ireland client companies, with 199,877 people now employed in companies supported by the Agency, including 2,703 jobs across 27 IDA Ireland client companies in Sligo and Leitrim.

IDA markets Sligo and Leitrim as part of the North West region, along with Donegal. The main FDI activity clusters that have been developed in the North West are in the life sciences and engineering sectors. IDA continues to promote the region to prospective investors from both those and other sectors.

The Regional Action Plan for the North East/North West represents the wider strategy for increasing employment in the region. This plan aims to support the creation of 28,000 new jobs across Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth by 2020. Significant progress has been made to date towards that objective, with 5,600 more people in employment across the region since the start of 2015.

More broadly, the Government is focussed on ensuring that Ireland is best placed to capitalise on whatever foreign direct investment (FDI) opportunities may emerge on account of Brexit. That is why significant additional funding has been provided to IDA Ireland to help the Agency better respond to the challenges and opportunities Brexit may present for each and every county of Ireland. I also regularly engage with the IDA about its Brexit-related requirements and other issues in connection with securing new investment for Ireland.

Job Creation

340. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to support the creation of jobs through the indigenous sector both in terms of traditional industry and innovative proposals in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16914/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): My Department, through Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) provide a range of supports to help Irish companies start, grow and export. There are now over 201,000 people employed by EI supported companies across the country. The fact that over 130,000 of those 201,000 jobs are outside of Dublin is significant. Enterprise Ireland client companies support a total of 1,546 jobs in Sligo and 922 jobs in Leitrim.

The objective of Enterprise Ireland's new 'Global Ambition' Strategy 2017-2020 is to sup-

port enterprises across the economy, to grow into strong Irish international companies, developing world-leading products and services and exporting them all around the world.

There is a vast range of programmes and supports offered to companies to drive this strategy. These include management capability, leadership and marketing/sales skills as well as promoting innovation and R&D. Investment in these areas is becoming more important as the demands of the marketplace evolve and become tougher.

In terms of supporting traditional industry, my view is that manufacturing in Ireland is still, and will always be, an essential part of a well-balanced economy. Our manufacturers have innovated and moved with the times – and they will continue to do so. Advances in ICT, new materials, biotechnology, fuels, and nanotechnology offer scope for continuous innovation in manufacturing. Together with the opening up of world markets, these advances offer great opportunities for Irish manufacturers.

Manufacturing today is not just about making things anymore. It's about finding solutions for a more sophisticated and demanding range of customers. It includes research, design, maintenance, sales and marketing, logistics and distribution too. The best way to protect and increase manufacturing jobs is to compete with excellent products and services, using high technology, drawing on design, innovation and our strong science base.

We are placing a particular focus on encouraging startups and small businesses to embrace the culture of innovation that now exists and maximise the benefits of technology.

My Department also ensures that companies can access the right type of funding, appropriate to their stage of development. This ranges from microfinance right through to seed and venture capital, development capital and risk-sharing credit guarantees through the banks.

Enterprise Ireland's activity across all sectors of the economy is supporting a total of 400,000 directly and indirectly supported jobs.

Furthermore, our 8 Regional Action Plans for Jobs are building on the jobs potential of each region. At local level, the LEOs, supported by EI, are supporting indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs in every county. There has been a number of recent LEO events in Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Cavan to highlight the key areas where clients may be exposed and to provide direction in how they might address these.

I am currently finalising plans for a regional initiative of up to €60m to support collaborative approaches to grow and sustain indigenous enterprise and jobs across the regions. This will be administered by Enterprise Ireland.

Job Creation

341. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to promote and support job creation through the small business sector with particular reference to the need to ensure the minimisation of practices likely to impede small businesses in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16915/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Enterprise Ireland (EI) are the main Agencies under the auspices of my Department that offer advice and support to the small business sector.

The LEOs are the ‘first-stop-shop’ State support service for micro and small businesses in each local area. The LEOs provide advice and direction, covering all government supports and requirements, to anyone who wishes to start or expand a business.

The LEOs can also provide funding for projects that meet certain criteria, generally with regard to export potential, and other non-financial supports such as training and mentoring. Businesses should contact their local LEO.

The Sligo and Leitrim LEOs are fully engaged in supporting the micro-enterprise and small business sectors in their areas to create and sustain jobs. In 2016, the number of jobs in micro-enterprises that had been supported by LEO Sligo and LEO Leitrim were 1,095 and 422 respectively.

Contact details and further information on the services available from the LEOs, including soft supports such as training and mentoring, can be accessed at www.localenterprise.ie.

Enterprise Ireland works in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales in global markets. They provide funding and supports for companies - from entrepreneurs with business propositions for a high potential start-up through to large companies expanding their activities, improving efficiency and growing international sales. Availability of all EI supports are communicated via www.enterprise-ireland.com and also through EI’s Development Advisors, EI Regional Offices and through public calls for applications.

EI companies currently support 1,546 and 922 jobs in Sligo and Leitrim respectively. EI job announcements in 2016 in the North West included LotusWorks (50 jobs in Sligo) and Vista-Med (200 jobs in Leitrim).

In the area of access to finance, a range of initiatives has been introduced - from Microfinance Ireland to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and from the Credit Guarantee Scheme to the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund - and continued investment in seed and venture capital through Enterprise Ireland. These initiatives remain available and accessible to business and continue to provide increased access to credit and finance for Irish enterprise.

Micro and small enterprises can also access information on over 170 different Government supports that are available for Irish based start-ups and small businesses via the Supporting SMEs online tool. The online tool is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups and small businesses navigate the range of Government supports available. By answering the eight quick questions in the online tool, micro and small businesses will, in one location, be able to:

- Find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them; and
- Obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit.

The online tool is an initiative developed under the Action Plan for Jobs and is available at: www.supportingsmes.ie.

Job Creation

342. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to compete for job creation opportunities inside and outside the EU for Irish citizens, particularly in anticipation of Brexit and the triggering of Article 50; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [16916/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Government has already taken a number of important initiatives, including in bolstering the capacity of our enterprise agencies to maximise job creation opportunities inside and outside the EU.

The recently published Action Plan for Jobs 2017 builds on this with specific measures to:

- support enterprises, particularly those most dependent on UK markets
- identify and target new markets
- assist Irish businesses expand and scale and
- help position Ireland to benefit from new opportunities that arise.

The Government has just published a new trade and investment strategy which is supported by an extensive programme of ministerial-led trade missions, as part of a major drive towards market diversification.

Enterprise 2025 continues to provide a solid roadmap for longer-term enterprise development with a focus on building the resilience of the enterprise base, export-led growth and job creation. In anticipation of the type of strategic exercise that may be needed to restate or reposition our global offering, I have asked my officials to undertake an urgent review of progress under Enterprise 2025.

At the Agency level I have directed IDA Ireland to explore the potential for winning more FDI on account of Brexit and the Agency and its staff are already working hard with this goal in mind.

In our efforts to win more FDI, we can continue to rely on the selling points that make investing in Ireland so attractive in the first place including our continued membership of the European Union and Eurozone.

I secured additional funding for IDA in 2017 to strengthen its capacity to communicate Ireland's unique selling points to the international business audience and to help target key markets to secure investment and jobs.

The potential sources of FDI are likely to come from:

- existing IDA Clients with a presence in Ireland who also have a presence in the UK;
- overseas clients (US, European and Asian) who have a presence in the UK but not in Ireland;
- UK companies operating in the UK who now need certain access to the European Market; and
- International clients without a presence in Europe seeking a European home.

From an indigenous enterprise perspective, Enterprise Ireland's strategy for the period 2017-2020 focuses on:

- Consolidating and growing exports into the UK market
- Expanding the Irish export global footprint, re-orienting towards N. America, Canada,

Asia and the Middle-East

- Expanding the EI Export Platform

I have already announced 39 extra staff for EI's overseas offices and in the Irish based team to support exporting companies in the context of Brexit. Staff will be assigned to:

- Markets that are growing and have scale (including China, India, Latin America, Africa);
- Markets where we are already well established but with potential for further growth (including UK, France, Benelux, Germany, US, the Nordics).

Trade Strategy

343. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the potential of increased trade with the US, Canada and other EU and non-EU locations post-Brexit and the triggering of Article 50; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16917/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): On 29 March 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May formally notified the European Council of the UK's intention to leave the EU in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

It is hard to predict at this stage the full impact of Brexit. Much will depend on the nature of the future trade deal that will be negotiated between the EU and the UK. These negotiations are likely to be complex and multifaceted.

Last month, the Government published a new Trade Strategy, Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World which supports an extensive programme of ministerial-led trade missions, as part of a major drive towards market diversification - promoting diversified export markets in light of the potential impacts of Brexit is a key priority for my Department. This includes markets that are growing and have scale as well as markets where we are already well established but with potential for further growth. The programme of trade missions and trade events for 2017 includes a substantive focus on the EU and third country markets. In 2017, we have 42 Minister led trade missions to existing and emerging markets. These have been orientated to reflect an increased focus on EU markets. Enterprise Ireland is consistently working with client companies focussing on enhancing their competitiveness, capability and levels of innovation to assist them to diversify into new markets.

The EU's suite of Free Trade Agreements with third Countries help to open new markets, break down barriers and provide new opportunities for Irish firms. These existing EU Agreements and new trade deals will continue to be important for Ireland. With a small domestic market, further expansion in other markets is essential to our continued economic growth.

Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new Free Trade Agreements giving Irish firms expanded market access and a predictable trading environment in third countries. The EU-Canada Free Trade Agreement will create sizeable new market access opportunities in services and investment in many sectors for Irish firms. My Department is already working with our agencies and Business Groups to ensure that Irish firms take early advantage of the terms of the Agreement. I will be

leading a trade mission to Canada in the first half of this year to promote the opportunities provided by the Agreement.

The EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement has led to a sizeable increase in Irish exports since it came into effect in 2011. This is the real evidence that Trade Agreements work for Irish exporters and Irish jobs.

Action Plan for Jobs

344. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her plans to encourage an even dispersal of investment throughout rural Ireland and in counties Sligo and Leitrim are on target in view of the necessity to achieve an evenly based balanced economy with equal opportunities throughout; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16918/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Regional Action Plan initiative is working to address regional and rural job creation by bringing different stakeholders in each of the 8 regions together to identify innovative and practical actions, to be taken across a range of Departments and agencies, with clear timelines for delivery over the period 2015 - 2017.

The plans are currently being monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. Collaboration between the private and the public sector has been a core element in each plan's development, and will be central to each plan's delivery. The first progress reports on these Plans were published in December showing that good progress is being made in their implementation.

A key objective of the plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the aim of having the unemployment rate of each region within one per cent of the national average.

The success of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs is crucial to the Government in meeting the ambition to create an additional 200,000 jobs, 135,000 of which are outside the Dublin region, by 2020.

Employment has been growing continuously for the past 17 quarters and over the past year employment has grown in all regions.

The most recent figures from the CSO also show that 70% of all jobs created in the past year were created outside Dublin.

The enterprise agencies are making a significant contribution to employment in the regions - 61% of new jobs by Enterprise Ireland firms in 2016 were outside Dublin and 52% of new jobs by IDA firms in 2016 were outside Dublin.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is stimulating job creation across the region, by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector, and through the provision of new competitive funds awarded through Enterprise Ireland, to support regional enterprise projects.

The North East/North West Plan aims to support the creation of 28,000 jobs across Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth by 2020. Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agrifood, manufacturing/engineering and tourism.

There has been a substantial improvement in the North East / North West region since the commencement of the National Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with an additional 23,000 in employment in Q4 2016 compared to Q1 2012. Moreover, there are now almost 6,800 more people in work in the region since the launch of the Regional Action Plan initiative.

The unemployment rate in the region has fallen from 10.2% in Q1 2015 to 8.0% at present, compared to the national rate of 6.7%.

IDA, Enterprise Ireland (EI), and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are making a significant contribution to employment in Sligo and Leitrim.

There are currently 27 multinational companies employing over 2,700 people in counties Sligo and Leitrim.

EI companies currently support 1,546 and 922 jobs in Sligo and Leitrim respectively. EI job announcements in 2016 in the North West included LotusWorks (50 jobs in Sligo) and Vista-Med (200 jobs in Leitrim).

The Sligo and Leitrim LEOs are fully engaged in supporting the micro-enterprise and small business sectors in their areas to create and sustain jobs. In 2016, the number of jobs that were created by micro-enterprises that had been supported by LEO Sligo and LEO Leitrim were 38 and 44 respectively.

My Department is providing additional funds through the agencies out to 2020. Together with Enterprise Ireland, I am currently finalising plans for a regional initiative of up to €60m to support collaborative approaches to grow and sustain jobs across the regions, and to encourage each county to reach its full potential.

Labour Court Recommendations

345. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department or the Workplace Relations Commission have conducted an analysis on the reason the Labour Court have overturned or varied 53% of adjudication officer decisions in 2016 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16934/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Critically, in 90 per cent of cases, the decision of the Adjudication Officer was accepted by the parties and was not appealed.

With regard to the statistics on appeals published in the WRC's 2016 Annual Report, and given the time period involved following the establishment of the WRC, the overall numbers of appeals to the Court are low.

As outlined in the WRC Annual Report, the position is that in relation to the decisions issued by the Labour Court in appeals on cases where the original complaint was made after 1 October 2015, of these, 47 per cent were upheld, 20 per cent were overturned and 31 per cent of those appealed were varied, mostly in relation to the quantum of the award. Two appeals were deemed to be outside the time-limits. As such, the vast majority of the decisions issued by the WRC were either accepted by the parties or upheld by the Labour Court.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body established on 1 October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015.

Section 41 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015 provides that an employee, or his/her rep-

representative may present a complaint to the Director General that the employee's employer has contravened a provision specified in Part 1 or 2 of Schedule 5 of the Act. Where such complaint is presented the Director General shall, subject to section 39, refer the complaint for adjudication by an adjudication officer. A party to proceedings under section 41 may appeal a decision of an adjudication officer to the Labour Court. All appeals to the Labour Court are de novo hearings and turn on the facts of the cases presented by the parties at the hearings.

Consultancy Contracts Data

346. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of her Department in the past five years 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; if she will provide copies of reports submitted to her from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16987/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The hiring of private investigation firms by agencies under the aegis of my Department is a day-to-day operational matter for the agencies concerned. I have asked the agencies to provide details of any such contracts and I will forward these to the Deputy once received.

Brexit Issues

347. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17005/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges in its work plans for 2017 across all its Divisions. A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs, Trade Policy and Safety and Chemicals Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by 1 Principal, 1 Assistant Principal, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. Additional staffing resources are being recruited to support the Brexit Unit, and other areas of the Department impacted by Brexit in the immediate period ahead, on foot of a recently completed workforce planning exercise for the Department in respect of the period 2017-2019. The full year salary costs for the Brexit Unit, including the additional staffing resources to be recruited, is estimated at approximately €500,000. In addition to this, funding is available to undertake appropriate research, and in light of the substantial programme of visits ongoing and planned at Ministerial and Official level to other capital cities as part of our outreach to our European partners, there will be associated travel and subsistence costs.

Brexit Issues

348. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated

section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17021/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Staffing levels of my Department reflect the requirement to manage the pay bill and staff numbers in accordance with Government pay policy with staff resources deployed in the most effective and efficient manner as appropriate to business needs and key priorities at any given time.

An additional €3 million was secured in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 and is being targeted specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit scenario. It is enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies recruit some 40 to 50 additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers. These numbers may grow as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, by agreement with the Department, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

The additional €3m has been allocated across:

- Enterprise Ireland
- IDA Ireland
- Science Foundation Ireland
- The Health and Safety Authority, and
- The Department itself (€250,000)

The Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges in its work plans for 2017 across all its Divisions. Brexit Unit staffing has been set at a team of 4 full-time staff for now as follows: 1 Principal, 1 Assistant Principal, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. In addition, the work of very many Business Units across the Department is impacted by Brexit. These Units have finalised their business plans for 2017 and the impact of Brexit for their work has been fully factored in. In addition, a workforce planning process spanning the years 2017-19 has recently been concluded. This process was coordinated by my Department’s HR Unit and reviewed the level of resources assigned across all Divisions of the Department in relation to our current strategic priorities, and, naturally, responding to Brexit features heavily in the plan. In this regard additional staffing resources will be recruited to support the Brexit Unit and other areas of the Department impacted by Brexit in the immediate period ahead.

Early Childhood Care and Education Staff

349. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of early years practitioners currently registered and working across the State in early years services, private and community, with qualification five and qualification six respectively. [16893/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the relevant qualifications (in Early Years or Early Childhood Care and Education) which are placed at Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the NFQ. I would like to bring it to the Deputy’s attention that there is no professional registry for early years professionals, however, qualifications of staff members are verified through regulatory inspections (Tusla) for all providers and regulatory and contractual inspections (Pobal) for ECCE providers. For figures, the best indicator is last year’s The Early Years Sector Profile Report 2015-16 which was published in November 2016. It is a survey which was administered by Pobal in conjunction

with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with the aim of providing a national picture of services providing early childhood care and education in Ireland. The survey on which the Report is based was completed by 79 per cent of childcare providers in April 2016. Pobal have extrapolated the figures provided in the Report in order to establish the qualification levels for early years practitioners at a national level. It is estimated that there are 23,291 early years practitioners currently employed in private and community services. Of these, 7,418 hold a level 5 on the National Qualification Framework (NFQ) while 8,926 hold a level 6 NFQ qualification.

A breakdown of qualifications by private/community services using the extrapolated figures was not carried out by Pobal and, as such, are not available presently.

The Early Years Sector Report 2015-2016 can be found on Pobal's website, www.pobal.ie.

Early Childhood Care and Education Staff

350. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of early years practitioners currently registered and working across the State in early years services with qualification seven and qualification eight respectively. [16894/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the relevant qualifications (in Early Years or Early Childhood Care and Education) at which are placed at Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the NFQ. I would like to bring it to the Deputy's attention that there is no professional registry for early years professionals, however, qualifications of staff members are verified through regulatory inspections (Tusla) for all providers and regulatory and contractual inspections (Pobal) for ECCE providers. For figures, the best indicator is last year's The Early Years Sector Profile Report 2015-16 which was published in November 2016. It is a survey which was administered by Pobal in conjunction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with the aim of providing a national picture of services providing early childhood care and education in Ireland. The survey on which the Report is based was completed by 79 per cent of childcare providers in April 2016. Pobal have extrapolated the figures provided in the Report in order to establish the qualification levels for early years practitioners at a national level. It is estimated that there are 23,291 early years practitioners currently employed in private and community services. Of these, 1,215 hold a level 7 on the National Qualification Framework (NFQ) while 2,687 hold a level 8 NFQ qualification.

The Early Years Sector Report 2015-2016 can be found on Pobal's website, www.pobal.ie

Early Childhood Care and Education

351. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding allocated to the learner fund for 2016-2017; the number of practitioners who availed of places available; and if all the funding allocated to the fund was availed of. [16895/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The amount of funding allocated to the learner fund in 2016 was €1.5m. In 2017, there is €3m allocated to the Learner Fund.

In 2016 the number of applications received under the Learner Fund was 1,032 and is broken down as follows:

- The third round of the Learner fund received 169 applications.
- The fourth round of the Learner fund received 863 applications.

In 2017, my Department made funding available to provide a bursary to childcare staff who have undertaken higher level courses at their own expense. 863 bursaries have been paid to date via the City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs). This number may change pending the appeals process.

Finally, I can confirm that all of the funding allocated to the Learner Fund in 2016 was not availed of. My Department is currently reviewing the Learner Fund in respect of 2017 and will release information on the next iteration shortly.

Departmental Funding

352. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied regarding the availability of adequate resources to meet the growing challenges in terms of rapid response, youth support services, social services, and investigative programmes throughout Ireland and especially in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16901/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Revised Estimate for my Department for 2017 provides a gross funding provision of €1.311 billion. This represents an increase of €173 million, or 16%, over my Department's 2016 allocation.

In 2017, youth services have an overall budget of €60 million, an additional €5.5m over their 2016 allocation. This funding supports the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities. Over 380,000 children and young people engaged with these services in 2016.

My Department is currently undertaking an exercise to map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department in developing a detailed socio-demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels, and will inform future development and investment in youth services in counties such as Sligo and Leitrim.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is receiving an additional investment of €37 million this year. In 2017, Tusla has an overall allocation of some €713 million which allows it to standardise, streamline and improve its services to children and families. The extra funding in 2017 allows Tusla to further alleviate service pressures in the areas such as unallocated caseloads, private residential care, foster care and domestic, sexual and gender based violence services.

In conclusion, the significant additional resources secured for 2017 will allow my Department and its agencies build on the good work by all involved in working with children and families to deliver on this Government's commitment to fundamentally reform the delivery of services.

Child Protection Services Provision

353. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the availability of adequate placement facilities for children at risk or deemed to be at risk in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16902/17]

357. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in foster care or protective residential care in counties Sligo and Leitrim; the demand arising from the need to ensure the welfare and well-being of such children; the availability of the required personnel and resources; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16906/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 357 together.

The latest figures from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, indicate that, at the end of January 2017, there were 6,323 children in care. Of these, 5,844 (92%) were in foster care and 341 (5%) were in residential care. Foster care is the main form of alternative care for children in need of care and protection, and it is the preferred option for children who cannot live with their parent(s)/guardian(s). Of the 5,844 children in foster care, there were 4,130 (71%) in a general foster care placement and 1,714 (29%) were in care with relatives. Residential care is the placement of choice for older children who have needs that are best met by this placement type. In general, residential care is based in domestic style homes, catering for between 1 and 4 or 5 older children.

All children in care should have an allocated social worker but it is important to note that if a child has not been allocated a social worker, the cases are reviewed regularly by the principal social worker and are managed by duty social work teams to support the child's needs. At the end of January 2017, 93% of all children in care had an allocated social worker (5,885/6,323) nationally.

At the end of 2016, there was a total of 103 children in care in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan area. Of the 103 children in care, 78 were in general foster care, 16 in foster care with a relative, 8 in a residential care placement and one child was in an other care placement. At the end of January 2017, there was a total of 101 children in care in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan administrative area and all had an allocated social worker. Tusla has advised that there are 9 registered residential care centres in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan area. Children placed in these centres include children from other geographic locations, especially from the greater Dublin area.

Tusla currently has 1,467 WTE social workers and an end of 2017 target of 1,520 WTE. This target is short of the target set in Survival to Sustainability by approximately 100 WTE and reflects the constraints of the social work labour supply. Funding is in place to address the issue of unallocated cases, however, the recruitment environment for social workers is very challenging. However, Tusla is also focusing on intervening at an early stage of a family difficulty through social care and family supports. Accordingly, Tusla is prioritising the recruitment of an additional 100 Family Support Practitioners, 166 social care staff and an additional 25 administrative staff to allow social workers to focus on their core work with children and their families.

Child Protection

354. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the resources available to her Department to meet the anticipated demands of children at risk here, especially in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16903/17]

356. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average time taken to investigate cases of children at risk of the various forms of abuse; the degree to which a systemic response is in place to deal with such issues here, and especially in counties

Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16905/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 354 and 356 together.

Children First National Guidance (2011) gives advice for notifying Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, of situations where abuse is suspected. A range of professionals including teachers, nurses, early years educators, Gardaí and other health professionals, who see children regularly, are in a good position to identify children at risk. Where someone has reasonable grounds for suspecting a child is being, or has been, abused, they are expected to immediately contact Tusla. The Children First Act, 2015, once it is fully commenced, will place a statutory obligation on key professionals (mandated persons) to report concerns of harm above a defined threshold to Tusla without delay. It is my intention that these provisions will be commenced by the end of 2017.

The latest breakdown of referrals available relate to quarter 3, 2016 and there was a total of 181 referrals received in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan administrative area during that period. Each referral received by Tusla is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team. Approximately 60% of referrals to Tusla are of a child welfare concern with the remaining 40% related to child protection concerns. Tusla's policy is to refer child welfare referrals to relevant family and community support services. At any stage, if a determination is made that there is abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglect, from which there is an ongoing risk of significant harm, the child protection pathway is followed. In a minority of cases this may lead to the child being placed on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) or the child being received into care. At the end of 2016, there was a total of 42 children listed as active on the CPNS in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan area.

At the end of January 2017, there were 101 children in care in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan administrative area. I am pleased to advise that every child in care in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan had an allocated social worker. Tusla has advised that there are 9 registered residential care centres in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan area. Children placed in these centres include children from other geographic locations, especially from the greater Dublin area.

Tusla provides me with information on a monthly and quarterly basis outlining the increasing demands for their services, and how they are dealing with children awaiting services. This information provides me with the information needed to assess how well we are supporting vulnerable children. Also, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), inspects Tusla child welfare and protection services, statutory children's residential care centres and foster care services while Tusla inspects children's residential centres run by the private and voluntary sectors.

This valuable and detailed information continues to inform the Department and Tusla in the business planning needed to maintain and further enhance the range of services for the care and protection of children. Tusla is currently engaged in the second year of a three year recruitment programme to expand the cohort of social workers, social care workers and business support staff. I have secured additional funding for Tusla to enable this to happen and the current and capital Exchequer funding provided for Tusla is some €713 million in 2017.

Child Protection

355. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the support services available to children who may be at risk as result of being undocumented non-

nationals here with special regards to counties Sligo and Leitrim; the measures taken to protect such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16904/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act, 1991 applies to all children resident in the State, irrespective of their immigration status. Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection. The Agency is obliged to provide care for these children for as long as their welfare requires it.

Children living in direct provision are in the care of their parent(s). Concerns about the welfare, safety or well-being of a child in direct provision are reported to Tusla in line with Children First guidelines. Tusla seconded an experienced social worker to the Reception and Integration Agency, in the Department of Justice and Equality, to liaise directly between Direct Provision and Tusla services.

Children First National Guidance (2011) gives advice for notifying Tusla of situations where abuse is suspected. A range of professionals including teachers, nurses, early years educators, Gardaí and other health professionals, who see children regularly, are in a good position to identify children at risk. Where someone has reasonable grounds for suspecting a child is being, or has been, abused, they are expected to immediately contact Tusla.

If a child is taken into care, their needs are given priority. A social worker is assigned to a child placed in State care and has a duty to prepare and regularly review the care plan for the child. Intrinsic to this process is ensuring that the wishes of the child are listened to, and if appropriate, Tusla may assist them in establishing residency.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are placed in care and have their needs assessed, and are allocated a social worker.

Question No. 356 answered with Question No. 354.

Question No. 357 answered with Question No. 353.

Youth Services Funding

358. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding available for youth services and youth development services in counties Sligo and Leitrim, with particular reference to areas of social and economic deprivation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16907/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €5.5m. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department provides funding to Sligo/Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service Project (€46,421 in 2017), Mohill Community Youth Project (€29,520 in 2017), Leitrim Youth Project (€86,803 in 2017) and Leitrim Traveller Youth Project (€15,103) under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. In addition, Sligo Youth Information Centre has

been allocated €66,921 in 2017.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to some 1,600 youth groups and clubs, with an estimated 89,000 club members around the country. The scheme, which is open to new entrants, is advertised locally and applications for funding are invited by the Education and Training Boards from local groups in their respective areas. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. In 2016, €1.065m was allocated to this scheme, of which €58,568 was allocated to Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim Education and Training Board. In 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715. My Department will be advising Education and Training Boards of their allocations later this month.

As the Deputy may be aware, a number of funding schemes supporting youth services were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department and consultations with youth services are continuing with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme as soon as possible. As part of this process, my Department has embarked on an exercise, in conjunction with Pobal and each Education and Training Board (ETB) Youth Officer, which will map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed socio-demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. It is my intention that this mapping exercise will inform future development and investment in youth services.

Children and Family Services Provision

359. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to assess specific deficiencies in respect of child care, youth support and-or development services, in particular counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16920/17]

360. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the supports in place to assist children or teenagers who may be vulnerable in child care, youth support and or development services, in particular counties Sligo and Leitrim; the extent to which she continues to liaise with specific groups in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16921/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 359 and 360 together.

It is recognised that particular groups of children and young people can face more challenges in achieving the five national outcomes set out in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020), and numerous specific commitments of the Framework reflect this.

My Department identified prevention and early intervention as a key cross-sectoral priority. This is being addressed through the Area-Based Childhood programme, the development of a Quality and Capacity Building initiative, and supporting relevant priorities of other Government Departments. As part of this, the Advisory Council for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, which brings together members of the community and voluntary sector as well as independent experts, has worked on a number of priority areas including homelessness and child poverty. Members of the Council and officials from my Department recently met with representatives

from Focus Ireland and St. Vincent de Paul to progress these issues.

My Department funds the County and City Childcare Committees (CCC) (including Sligo and Leitrim CCCs); and Childcare Committees Ireland, to provide business support to services. Funding is also provided to Better Start, to provide a quality support service and to Pobal who undertake compliance visits on behalf of this Department, and the Department of Education and Skills who provide education focussed support to childcare providers.

My Department also administers a range of funding schemes and targeted programmes that support the provision of youth services for young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. My Department provides funding to Sligo/Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service Project (€46,421 in 2017), Mohill Community Youth Project (€29,520 in 2017), Leitrim Youth Project (€86,803 in 2017) and Leitrim Traveller Youth Project (€15,103) under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. In addition, Sligo Youth Information Centre has been allocated €66,921 in 2017.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. In 2016, €1.065m was allocated to this scheme, of which €58,568 was allocated to Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim Education and Training Board.

I have visited many youth services and projects across the country since taking office and I am committed to continuing to do so. Officials in my Department have regular contact with the larger national youth organisations and with the sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Mayo Sligo and Leitrim ETB. I, along with my officials, meet with 30 national youth organisations every six months.

As the Deputy may be aware, a number of funding schemes supporting youth services were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department, and consultations with youth services are continuing, with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme in line with the review.

My Department is well advanced on an exercise, in conjunction with Pobal, and each Education and Training Board (ETB) Youth Officer, which will map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department and the relevant ETB's in developing a detailed socio-demographic profile, in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. It is my intention that this mapping exercise will inform future development and investment in youth services.

The Deputy will also be aware that my Department provides funding for the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. In 2017, Tusla has been allocated Exchequer funding of €713 million, representing an increase of €37 million on 2016. Tusla provides a comprehensive range of services and supports for vulnerable children and families. These include: Child Welfare and Protection Services, including family support services; Educational Welfare Services; Pre-school Inspection services and Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services. Tusla works closely with other care providers including the HSE, in respect of access to primary care services, child and adolescent mental health services, disability and other services. Tusla and the HSE monitor their interagency relationship to ensure that they are working effectively in the best interests of children and families.

My Department is currently working on legislation to reform the Guardian ad litem service. Guardians ad litem perform a very important function in child care proceedings. They are an invaluable source of advice to the Courts and a great support for the children and young people

who are involved in these proceedings. The reform proposals will address significant inadequacies in the existing arrangements and will replace the existing ad hoc system with a high quality, child-centred, cost effective national service. Most importantly, it will extend the Guardian ad litem system to benefit the greatest number of children and young people.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

361. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the time-frame for the date for publishing an interim report into the Tuam mother and baby home. [16956/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am very conscious that it has not been possible to date to publish the Second Interim Report. However, as I have previously outlined, it has been necessary for me to engage with Cabinet colleagues on issues in the report which extend beyond my remit as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I briefed the Cabinet on the matter again on Tuesday the 28th of March and expect be able to clarify the time frame for completion of this process shortly.

I am sensitive to the expectations of former residents and their advocates who wish to see the contents of this Report. My Department will contact representative groups to advise of developments prior to any public announcement.

Consultancy Contracts Data

362. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi-State bodies under the aegis of her Department in the past five years 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; if she will provide copies of reports submitted to her from these firms as a result of his engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16979/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The bodies under the aegis of my Department are the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Ombudsman for Children and the Oberstown Children Detention Campus. I have referred the Deputy's question to each of these bodies and asked them to provide the information sought directly to the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

363. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16997/17]

364. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17013/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 363 and 364 together.

There is no senior official in my Department with designated responsibility for Brexit matters. My Department is represented at Principal Officer level on the Interdepartmental Committee on Brexit chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. I have no specific Brexit Unit and, accordingly, no funding allocated or anticipated costs.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

365. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Question No. 35 of 28 February 2017, when the second interim report on the commission of investigation into mother and baby homes will be published; the details of the scoping exercise to examine an extension of the terms of reference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17144/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am very conscious that it has not been possible to date to publish the Second Interim Report. However, as I have previously outlined, it has been necessary for me to engage with Cabinet colleagues on issues in the report which extend beyond my remit as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I briefed the Cabinet on the matter again on Tuesday the 28th of March and expect be able to clarify the time frame for completion of this process shortly.

I am sensitive to the expectations of former residents and their advocates who wish to see the contents of this Report. My Department will contact representative groups to advise of developments prior to any public announcement.

While some of the issues raised in recent weeks are outside the intended remit of this Commission, I have committed to carrying out a scoping exercise regarding the Commission's terms of reference to see if broader terms of reference would help answer the many questions now arising. In accordance with the legal framework under which the statutory Commission was established, it is my intention to consult with the Commission on this matter, and I will make further announcements about this process in the coming weeks.

Air Quality

366. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide a copy of the results of the air-quality test that was carried out in the main technical stores, Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel and adjoining office complex on the 9 February 2017 by an external assessor. [16892/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Occupational Air Survey Report referred to by the Deputy was forwarded to the Military Authorities on 28th March 2017 by the external assessor.

The monitoring found that none of the areas tested exceeded the Occupational Exposure Limits outlined in the 2016 Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare (Chemical Agents) Regulations, 2001.

In line with the recommendations of the report, I am informed by the Military Authorities that;

1. All personnel working in the Technical Stores building were paraded and informed of the content of the report and its findings.

2. The report is currently available for viewing by all personnel at the Air Corps Health and Safety Office.

3. In due course the report will be published on the Defence Forces Intranet site.

Consultancy Contracts Data

367. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of private investigation firms hired by statutory agencies and or semi states under the aegis of his department in the past five years 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; if he will provide copies of reports submitted to him from these firms as a result of his engagement [16981/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only State body under the aegis of my Department is the Army Pensions Board. Neither my Department nor the Army Pensions Board has hired any private investigation firms in the past 5 years.

Brexit Issues

368. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16999/17]

369. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17015/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 and 369 together.

The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union. While the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is expected that Brexit will have an impact on future developments in the Defence sphere.

The structures put in place in the Department of Defence to address the potential challenges arising from Brexit include the assignment of responsibility to a senior official at Assistant Secretary General level in relation to Brexit related matters. The senior official is leading the Department's input to deliberations within the framework established across Government and is supported in their role by a number of branches in the Department. The senior official represents the Department on the Interdepartmental Group on EU-UK Affairs which is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and is engaged with the identification of key strategic, operational and policy issues arising from Brexit. In addition, the Management Board is acting as a clearing house for Brexit and maintains oversight on an ongoing basis.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU. Accordingly, any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP, or regarding our wider international multilateral defence engagements, will be

5 April 2017

also addressed within that framework.

As matters relating to Brexit are currently being absorbed and dealt with within already existing Department structures and resources, there is currently no dedicated Brexit funding allocation in the Department of Defence.

As the Deputy is aware the UK triggered Article 50 on 29 March 2017 and a meeting of 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, including whether there will be a future requirement for a dedicated unit to exclusively handle Brexit related matters.