

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Adoption Records Provision

10. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if choice will exist for those seeking to avail of adoption information and tracing services; if Tusla will be the sole provider; and the extra resources which will be allocated to Tusla to deal with likely increased demand for its services (details supplied). [22172/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): At present, adoption information and tracing services are provided on an administrative basis by Tusla, the Adoption Authority of Ireland and by six bodies that have been accredited by the Authority under the Adoption Act 2010.

I am aware of the expertise and professionalism of the agencies currently accredited for this purpose. However, the Bill is carefully balanced to allow a statutory agency to provide sensitive personal information about a birth parent to an adopted person without consent. This provision is supported by a suite of measures to ensure that the birth parent's constitutional rights are safeguarded. From a legal perspective, I am advised that the transfer to non-statutory agencies of the information required to provide a service may not be compatible with the protection of rights that the Bill aims to provide. For this reason, Tusla will be the sole provider of adoption information and tracing services under the Bill.

I should emphasise that legislation will operate on a presumption in favour of disclosing information in so far as is legally and constitutionally possible. It provides clarity regarding the information that can be provided and the circumstances in which it can be provided. It provides that an adopted person aged 18 years or over who was adopted before the proposed legislation comes into operation, will be provided with his/her birth certificate information, as held on record, following a request to Tusla, subject to certain conditions. An adopted person may request information about his or her birth parents, the existence of birth relatives, and the adopted person's early life circumstances. They can also request their own medical information, and medical information regarding a birth relative where this is likely to be of relevance to the maintenance or management of the physical or mental health of the adopted person or his or her relative. Where this information is held on record, it can be provided to an adopted person without consent. The Bill also provides that the Adoption Authority will be responsible for collecting, restoring, preserving and the safekeeping of all adoption records.

A key concern in this Bill will be to achieve a fair and reasonable balance between the rights of adopted persons and their birth parents. I believe we can get this balance right, and I look

forward to discussing the Bill further as it progresses through both Houses.

Question No. 11 answered orally.

Question No. 12 answered with Question No. 6.

Child Care Costs

13. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address concerns that up to 9,000 families that were to receive a targeted level of subsidy under the single affordable childcare scheme will now receive the universal level of subsidy instead; and her plans to support childcare affordability for these families, particularly if prices rise under the single affordable childcare scheme, as is anticipated. [22334/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to confirm that major improvements in childcare subsidies will come into effect this September, including increases of up to 50% in targeted childcare subsidy rates and a new universal childcare subsidy for children aged between 6 and 36 months. September's changes will be delivered through existing childcare schemes, pending the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS), which will come into operation at the earliest possible date.

It is estimated that up to 70,000 children will benefit from childcare subsidies from September, which would more than double the number of beneficiaries of existing schemes. I want to stress that these figures – and also figures on ACS take-up – are estimates. The take-up of childcare subsidies depends not just on eligibility, but on parental demand for childcare and on the availability of childcare places. Given the expected level of parental demand, it was estimated that 79,000 children would benefit from the ACS during its first year of operation. The estimated difference of 9,000 this September is partly accounted for by children aged 3 and older whose family incomes are above the threshold for a GP Visit Card but below the threshold for the ACS. The difference is also partly accounted for by children aged 3 and older whose parents may be eligible for a GP Visit Card – or other eligibility criterion – but have not taken it up.

An information campaign in the coming weeks will aim to minimise low take up through raising awareness among parents about eligibility. In such cases, the families we are talking about generally have incomes near the maximum income-threshold for the ACS, and the subsidy payable under the targeted elements of the ACS would therefore be small. Further, in such cases, when children are aged less than 3, their families will be able to benefit from the universal, non means tested subsidy of up to €80 per month .

We are not anticipating widespread price rises as a result of increased subsidisation of childcare. Of course, prices are entirely at the discretion of childcare providers. However, the scope for price increases will be constrained by the fact that some parents with children aged over 3 will not receive a subsidy. Nevertheless, my Department will keep the matter under active review.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

14. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for an alternative legal solution for illegally adopted persons that have been prejudged by the mother and baby home commission's failure to request the full facts on illegal adoptions from the Adoption Authority of Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22316/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes is independent in the performance of its functions. The approach to its investigation is a matter for the Commission and I do not have any information on its engagement with the Adoption Authority or other individuals, groups or corporate bodies.

In its Second Interim Report, which I published on the 11th of April, the Commission acknowledges that the term ‘illegal adoption’ is used to cover a wide range of situations and actions including the incorrect registration of a birth. The Commission sympathises with the need for people in such situations to establish their true identity but reports that “*it is difficult to see what assistance could be provided by further investigation.*” The Report notes that “*not even a national DNA database would assist all of the people .*”

The Commission suggests that an amnesty from prosecution may help “*to encourage those responsible to come forward and correct the record.*” The legal implications and practicalities of any such amnesty need considerable further consideration and I will explore this matter further with the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Social Protection, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General.

The Adoption Act 1952 provided a legal basis for adoption in Ireland. This brought order to what had been the system of ad-hoc arrangements in lieu of formal adoption procedures up to this point. Prior to the introduction of the Adoption Act 1952 some children were placed in life long family care arrangements, where a child was in the custody of a person other than his or her parent or guardian and where no adoption order was effected. These arrangements were never formalised.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 was published on 23 November 2016. As the Deputy will be aware, this Bill is intended to facilitate access to adoption information and operates on the basis of a presumption in favour of disclosing information in so far as is legally and constitutionally possible. The Bill will, for the first time, provide a statutory basis for the provision of information related to both past and future adoptions. It will provide clarity around the information that can be provided and the circumstances in which it can be provided. The Bill provides that adopted persons, birth parents, relatives, a person who was in an informal arrangement where no adoption order was effected, and persons whose birth was incorrectly registered, can engage with the adoption information and tracing services to be provided by Tusla.

Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

15. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the Government has not recommissioned the SAVI report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22331/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I believe that the first report on Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI 1) made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the area. I am supportive, in principle, to an appropriate follow-up study, and I will pursue this further with the Tánaiste, whose Department leads on this area.

The Department of Justice and Equality plays a whole-of-Government role in this area through the National Office for the prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (Cosc). That Department has indicated that it is investigating the resource implications and approaches to identify a ring-fenced funding stream for undertaking this body of work.

I understand that the proposal for a second Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI 2) research project envisages a significant level of expenditure over a three year period by the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills and my Department. The overall expenditure has been estimated to be approximately €920,000 over three years, of which €230,000 is being sought from my Department.

Apart from the funding of existing commitments relating to the *Growing Up in Ireland* Study, my Department has only a very limited commissioned research budget. The majority of this budget has been committed for 2017 and 2018.

In relation to the prioritisation of expenditure, Tusla has advised my Department that its priority in this area is aimed at enhancing its knowledge regarding Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in order to support the planning and commissioning of services. To this end, Tusla is working with funded service provider organisations to implement standard data gathering and reporting mechanisms and to address data quality issues.

In addition, Tusla advises that, in implementing its obligations under both the Istanbul Convention and commitments under the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, it will be examining how to address specific research and evidence needs to inform future commissioning and to support the measurement of outcomes.

Finally, there are important public procurement considerations, and accordingly, in order to be compliant with public procurement rules, any commissioned research funded by my Department is subject to the procurement process.

Children in Care

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which all allegations regarding the abuse of children or vulnerable young adults in institutions, foster homes or otherwise in the care of the State have been fully investigated or are in the course thereof; the action taken or pending to prevent reoccurrences; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22327/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla holds the statutory responsibility for child welfare and protection, and is the appropriate body to receive reports relating to the safety and well-being of a child. This applies to children under the age of 18, living in their own home or living in care. Each referral received by Tusla is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team.

Any complaint or allegation of abuse made by a child in care is dealt with urgently and seriously. Children First procedures apply to the investigation of the allegation. The safety and well being of the child are the key priority.

There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care. Placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker, and the provision of care services is monitored by Tusla management and subject to inspections by the Health Information Quality Authority and by Tusla Registration Services.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care, or EPIC. Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tulsa, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children .

We have a strong set of child protection measures, and have made significant improvements in recent years - but we cannot be complacent. Increased funding for Tusla in Budget 2017 provides additional capacity for Tusla to respond to areas of identified risk and anticipated demand. It will also allow Tusla to progress key service developments during 2017.

Early Childhood Care and Education Standards

17. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has given consideration to a streamlining of the inspections system for the early years sector in order to decrease the amount of administrative work carried out by services. [22310/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Deputy, the safety and protection of our children is always the top priority – I know the whole house will agree on that. Inspection of the early years sector is important to ensure our children are safe and to make sure education quality and standards are met.

As someone who has more than three decades experience working and campaigning with the sector I am also aware that inspections, administration and red tape remains one of the main challenges. Clearly there is a balance to be struck. As Minister I am committed to a coherent, streamlined inspection system which does not require us to compromise on child protection issues, quality and high standards.

The Early Years Inspectorate at Tusla and the Inspectorate in the Department of Education and Skills both conduct inspections. Each focuses on different aspects of the services – Tusla on safety and protection, the Department of Education and Skills on quality. Deputy, such dual inspection regimes are not uncommon and in fact operate in several other countries and jurisdictions. Despite the unique focus of both the inspection units they are committed to working closely together in order to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens on, or disruption to, early years services.

My own officials also lead a group called the Operations and Systems Alignment Group. In addition to both inspection units it also involves other bodies including Pobal and the Early Years Specialist Unit. Its ongoing work is to ensure that the approach taken is the most efficient – including the sharing of data and reaching agreement on scheduling visits in advance.

I accept there has been a settling down period between the two inspection units, bearing in mind the Department of Education Inspectorate is still in its first year in operation. I am assured that the levels of co-operation will increase as the relationship between both units becomes more firmly established.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

18. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when she expects the second part of sustainability funding for community early years to be made available; the status of long term sustainability funding for the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22309/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2017, I have made €1m of additional funding has been made available to childcare providers who have been facilitating the training of Community Employment participants, to ensure that regulatory

changes do not hinder service delivery or the availability of childcare places.

There are two phases to this funding. The first is for HR and recruitment supports, while the second will provide funding to pay the costs of the required additional staff until September 2017 in the first instance. I am making up to €2,000 available for services initially, to assist with the recruitment process or to provide expert support in HR management. I understand that all but one of the services impacted have now accessed this funding.

County Childcare Committees are now working closely with the affected services on the second phase to establish the amounts, and timing, of the payments that they will need to maintain services. Funding is available now, but it is not possible to issue payment until services can identify their need; nor would it be prudent to issue flat-rates, as each service has different needs. My officials are committed to progressing applications as soon as they are received.

In the longer term, the question of sustainability must be addressed comprehensively, and at the core of this is working with community services to develop adequate funding streams and business models.

The Deputy will be aware that I have recently announced a significant expansion and extension of the funding available under the Community Childcare Subvention from September of this year; which I anticipate will be of significant assistance to families but also to services. In addition arrangements are progressing for the provision of ‘non-contact time’ funding to services this summer, amounting to €14.5m per annum. I will also be examining how the €1m sustainability funding provided for 2017 can be used in 2018, and I will be working with the sector and stakeholders in this endeavour.

I have asked my officials to progress the Independent Review of the Cost of Childcare as a priority. This will seek to build a comprehensive picture of the drivers of cost in community - and private- services, and will inform future funding models and Estimate processes.

Improving access to high quality and affordable childcare remains a key priority for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

19. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress that has been made on the identification of the bodies found in the mother and baby home in Tuam; the location of the deceased; if the facilities are sufficient to allow identification of the remains; the progress that has been made in contacting members of the public that may have family members among the deceased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22176/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The discovery of human remains by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Home’s has deeply affected many people. I have visited the site of the former home in Tuam and met with former residents and their families, so I am acutely aware that many people are experiencing a great deal of anxiety and anticipation for what might happen next. For these reasons it is very important that Government and all relevant agencies respond sensitively and respectfully to these issues, with particular regard for the hurt and pain involved for those directly connected to the former Tuam Mother and Baby Homes.

While the Commission has concluded its physical excavations in Tuam, it has not yet reached any formal conclusions about the site. The Commission is continuing its comprehensive pro-

gramme of work and the facts which will be established by its investigations will further assist relevant authorities.

The Government is mindful that there are many questions to which people understandably want answers, including the matters raised by the Deputy. Since the Commission announced the discovery of human remains at this location, the Government has been working to establish an inclusive process which can engage with interested parties with a view to building a consensus on how these sensitive issues could be addressed. It is essential that this process respects the memory and dignity of the deceased children who lived their short lives in this home.

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs my focus is on bringing a coordinated approach to this process which by necessity involves a number of Government Departments and State agencies with specific roles in respect to these issues. Galway County Council are the owners of the site and I have met with my colleague Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, to discuss the central role of the Council in actively progressing matters. As part of these discussions, I am considering the potential for specialist expertise to provide additional technical advice and assistance. I also understand that Galway County Council has been liaising directly with the Commission and has written to the Coroner around these matters.

While it will take some further time to resolve all the questions which have arisen, it is important to again reassure the public that the site has been sealed and secured by the Commission to protect the remains which are interred pending the outcome of current deliberations.

Questions Nos. 20 and 21 answered with Question No. 11.

Youth Services Funding

22. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration will be given to a request for funding for a youth project (details supplied) in view of the growing demand for a range of services provided by this organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22319/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In recent weeks I was delighted to approve funding of €800,000 for the establishment of new youth projects and the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases. This additional investment will be provided in regions of the country where there is a pressing need for services to meet the needs of young people.

The network of sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Cavan and Monaghan ETB, has been invited to nominate locations within their catchment areas for the establishment of new services and to nominate a project or service to be considered for augmentation. The closing date for nominations was yesterday, 10th May. I hope to announce details of the successful areas and projects in the coming months following a comprehensive assessment process of the applications.

A number of funding schemes supporting youth services, including the “Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund”, were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. The review made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department and consultations with youth services are continuing with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme in line with the review. The new services being established in 2017 will be in line with recommendations of the Value for Money

and Policy Review.

Future funding decisions will also be informed by a recent mapping exercise which has provided a detailed social demographic profile, in terms of population number and deprivation levels, with existing youth service provision mapped onto the data.

Family Resource Centres

23. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review the number of family resource centres in County Kildare in view of the level of current centres relative to population, in particular, community centre locations in Kildare town and Castledermot as possible locations for new family resource centres in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22337/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his question.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre Programme. Under the Programme Tusla provides financial support towards the running costs of Family Resource Centres (FRCs) nationwide. There are currently two FRCs in County Kildare that receive funding under the Programme. They are based in Newbridge and the Curragh.

The total core funding allocation for FRCs in Kildare last year was €214,000.

I recognise that County Kildare has experienced a significant increase in its population base, and that there is a strong demand for services in the area. If additional funds are sought by Tusla and allocated to the Programme in the future, there will be scope to review the potential to increase the level of support provided to centres.

I should emphasise that Family Resource Centres are not owned and managed by Tusla - rather Tusla provides financial support to the centres. The establishment of new Family Resource Centres does not come under the remit of Tusla.

Child and Family Agency Data

24. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases relating to adult retrospective disclosures which have been referred to Tusla since 2011; the number that remain unallocated; and the number of those which are deemed high risk. [22330/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A historical or retrospective disclosure is where an adult discloses abuse experienced in childhood. I understand that the overwhelming majority of such disclosures are about sexual abuse.

Tusla has advised me that there were 1,895 historical/retrospective cases on hand at the end of March 2017. Tusla has also indicated that, included in these cases, they received 354 reports from adults about past abuse during the first three months of this year. Of the cases on hand, 1,141 were allocated to a social worker, and 754 were awaiting allocation. All of these referrals have been reviewed by a social worker and 120 were categorised as high priority.

This is a very complex and worrying situation. The safety of children now is my top priority.

It is very important to point out that all child protection referrals which allege current or past criminal activity are referred to An Gardaí Síochána. Tusla's focus is to screen historical/retrospective disclosures for any indication of current risk to children. In cases of urgent need, the disclosure is acted on immediately.

Tusla has a limited role where there is no evidence of a current risk to children. In relation to the adult making the disclosure, Tusla may assist them in accessing HSE counselling services.

Tusla's policy in assessing risk relating to an adult about whom an allegation of sexual abuse has been made is strictly guided by the principles set out in the Barr Judgement. In such cases, the person must be informed of the nature of the allegation and the identity of the person who is making the complaint. Tusla must adhere to the practice of due process and fair procedure.

Tusla has put in place a service improvement plan-with experienced social workers dealing with the high priority cases. Medium and lower priority cases will be dealt with by social workers drawn from other services and provided with training and supervision.

I have asked Tusla to report to me monthly on the progress they are making.

Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

25. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps both Tusla and her Department have taken to ensure that the accommodation of unaccompanied child refugees from the Calais camp is taking place without delay; if she has satisfied herself with the results to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22339/17]

33. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the arrival of unaccompanied child refugees from the former Calais camp; the number of child refugees that are now fully integrated and living here since the programme began; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22338/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25 and 33 together.

I am delighted to report to the Deputy that good progress has been made with regard to this issue. Recently, I was informed that to date 21 children have come to Ireland through the Calais Special Project (CSP). Of these 19 children are now in care placements and a further 2 children, in keeping with our process of assistance, were reunited with family members.

I would like to note that carrying out such an important mission in a safe and effective manner is no small task. From the granting of refugee status under the *International Protection Act 2015* to the arrival of a child into safety and security in Ireland - a detailed process must occur. Social workers meet the children in France to assess their needs in terms of education, health, linguistic knowledge, family ties and recent experiences. This process improves the capacity of the placement organised for the child to meet their needs, and provide whatever additional services are required. It is this thoughtful approach that lays the foundations for a successful care placement, facilitating human flourishing.

Preceding our progress to date, there has been an all-Government response aimed at efforts to address the plight of the young people who were previously in the unofficial camps near Calais. Tusla has put in place a Calais Special Project to manage the aspects of this response that come within its remit. There has been positive coordination between the relevant State bodies. Our current progress has been augmented by the support and guidance of the International Or-

ganisation for Migration, Irish Refugee Protection Programme, International Protection Office, the French Ministry of the Interior, the French Red Cross, the Irish Embassy in France, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I welcome the results of our humanitarian effort to date and the course we are on with respect to the Dáil resolution passed last November.

Family Resource Centres

26. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider making necessary funding available to a centre (details supplied) to purchase their existing building and for renovations. [22192/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his question.

My officials have already received correspondence on this matter, and have consulted with Tusla in this regard.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the valuable work of Family Resource Centres (FRCs). I very much value the positive impact of their work in supporting families and local communities. FRCs provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy. This allows for early identification of need, provision of appropriate interventions, and timely referrals to appropriate services.

The FRC in question has received funding under Tusla's Family Resource Centre Programme since 2004. Core funding from Tusla covers the employment of a full-time Co-ordinator, a part-time Development Worker and a part-time Administrator. It should be emphasised that Tusla is not the sole funder of FRCs.

Tusla has advised me that this FRC offers early intervention support to families in difficulty and it has experienced financial pressures over recent years. In 2016, Tusla provided funding of €82,940 to support the Centre in its work.

I recognise the benefits that additional space would bring to this FRC, and I understand the wish of its Board of Management to secure the property. Tusla is continuing to support the Centre with a contribution towards the running costs but is not in a position to provide funding for the purchase of the property.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

27. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to address the issues and concerns raised in the recent Mary case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22360/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Initiatives to address the findings of the care review for "Mary" have been put in place that will, at the very least, minimise the risk of a reoccurrence of this kind of event. Actions have already been taken by the HSE and Tusla which address the findings of the report.

The HSE and Tusla have published a joint protocol to promote the best interests of children in care with a serious disability, I am assured it is being implemented. This is strengthening

the collaborative structures between Tusla and the HSE in this area. The protocol clarifies the separate and distinct roles of both agencies and will in particular ensure joint and effective management of the transition to adult services of young people leaving care with a disability or who have complex mental health issues.

“Mary” is a young woman with an intellectual disability who continued to reside in her former foster placement on reaching adulthood, when a retrospective allegation of child sexual abuse had been made against one of the foster carers. “Mary” was an adult when the allegation was reported and a safeguarding plan was put in place.

It is important to note that the case review was clear that there was a high level of commitment to “Mary” by the individual Tusla, HSE and NGO staff involved in her care. I am also mindful that, while an allegation was made, there has been no evidence of any wrongdoing involving children placed with the foster family, or involving “Mary” herself.

I want to acknowledge that the Government response was a collaborative effort between myself, Minister Harris and Minister McGrath, with the unflagging support of Ministers McEntee and Byrne.

Aftercare Services

28. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of young persons under and over 18 years of age that were on a waiting list to access an aftercare worker at the end of 2016 by area, in tabular form; the average length of time a young person spends on the waiting list before gaining access to an aftercare worker; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22333/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has informed me that in 2016, a total of 605 young persons left care that year. The reason for his being that they had reached 18 years of age. At the end of 2016, Tusla has indicated that 1,055 young persons in care were aged 16 or 17 years of age. Of these 432 (41%) had been allocated an aftercare worker. Tusla has advised that it does not collate data on the waiting periods before an aftercare worker has been assigned. I have made the tabular data requested by the Deputy available for inclusion in the record of the House.

Each year, between approximately 500-600 young persons will turn 18 years of age while in care. In recent times, I understand that about 75% of 17 year olds in care were in foster placements, a further 20% approximately were reported to be placed in residential settings. The remaining 5% are in other settings, for example a disability setting or supported lodgings.

I am conscious that the transition to independent adulthood can be challenging for many young people. This is particularly true for children and young people in care. Planning for leaving care needs to begin in the years prior to leaving care and continue as part of the care planning process. This preparatory work is facilitated by a social worker and is based on collaboration with the young person, their carers and partner agencies. It is specific to the individual young person’s needs. During the preparation for leaving care an aftercare worker is introduced to the young person. They are involved in the preparation for the leaving care process.

Tusla prioritises children in residential care, and short term foster care, for the early allocation of an aftercare worker. Children in long term foster care, with an allocated social worker, have their aftercare plan developed with the social worker. If their plan is to remain living with their foster carers, on a case by case basis, it may be considered best practice that they would be allocated an aftercare worker when they are in their 17th year. I believe that this is a pragmatic

approach which matches needs to available resources.

There are pending amendments to the Child Care Act 1991 which will place a statutory obligation to provide an aftercare plan before the young person leaves care. I intend that this provision will be commenced shortly. I have secured the funding needed to recruit additional aftercare workers to enable Tusla to deliver this new commitment in full.

In some situations, the child's social worker may continue in the role of an aftercare worker when the child reaches 18 years. My Department working to implement the changes that are needed. There is no doubt that improvements are needed and I intend to ensure that they happen.

Children 16 & 17 years with an allocated aftercare worker at end December 2016

Area	Number of 16 & 17 year olds in care	Number with allocated after-care worker
Dublin South East/Wicklow	48	33
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	91	31
Dublin South Central	62	8
Midlands	63	49
Dublin North City	121	26
Dublin North	56	27
Louth/Meath	70	39
Cavan/Monaghan	19	10
Kerry	24	17
Cork	143	52
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	70	6
Waterford/Wexford	59	20
Donegal	29	19
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	22	22
Mayo	20	20
Galway/Roscommon	63	24
Midwest	95	29
National Total	1,055	432

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will recommend to the mother and baby home commission to extend the sampling method as established in the terms of reference to include the six institutions currently excluded from the full inquiry, but included partially in exit pathways; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22317/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will be aware, under the terms of reference set out in S.I. No. 57 of 2015, the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (and certain related Matters) is currently investigating the 14 named Mother and Baby Homes and a representative sample of County Homes. Section 14 of the Commissions terms of reference states that the Commission has the discretion to use such sampling techniques or selection of samples as it may determine, this provision is

intended to assist the Commission to effectively and comprehensively investigate those matters within its terms of reference.

It is not fully clear from the question which specific institutions the Deputy is referring to or whether the suggested course of action is compatible with the provisions of the Commission of Investigations Act 2004. In regard to making recommendations to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (and certain related Matters) the Deputy will be aware that the Commission is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Second Interim Report of the Commission which I published on the 11th April 2017 did not make any recommendation regarding an extension of their terms of reference. The Commission stated that it was satisfied that the institutions it is investigating are 'unquestionably' the main such homes that existed during the 20th century and that it does not currently recommend that other institutions be investigated.

I am conscious that the Commission's terms of reference already include mechanisms to ensure that any additional matters which the Commission may deem to warrant investigation can be brought to the attention of Government. However, I have committed to a scoping of Commission's terms of reference to see if broader terms of reference would help answer additional questions now arising and will carry it out with a focus on allowing the Commission to complete its existing work in the first instance. The Commission will be consulted as part of this process in accordance with the Commission of Investigations Act 2004 .

Early Years Sector

30. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to tackle the lack of availability of early years service provision to those under three years of age; and the work being undertaken by her Department to ensure that there is not a monopoly of early childhood care and education provision in the services for babies under three years of age. [22311/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Data from Pobal's Early Years Sector Profile 2015-2016 suggests that 22% of enrolments in regulated childcare in 2016 were children less than 3 years old, which is an increase on the 16-17% figures of recent years. However, my Department is aware that there is anecdotal evidence of a reduction in places for children from birth to three in centre based care, as some service providers have adapted their service offering to children aged three and older, due to increased state investment for this age group. Pobal will conduct this profile on an annual basis so that my Department can continue to actively monitor the situation.

The affordability measures introduced by my Department commencing this September will significantly increase targeted childcare subsidies, including to children under three years of age, and will for the first time provide a universal subsidy for up to 33,000 children under the age of three of up to €20 per week. This new subsidy marks an important investment in the 0-3 years age cohort, supporting all parents of children under three in registered childcare providers that take part in the scheme.

When the Affordable Childcare Scheme is introduced, subsidy rates will, for the first time, vary according to the age of the child. The highest subsidy rates will be provided to the youngest children, reflecting the higher cost of providing childcare to younger age groups as a result of differences in the adult-child ratio required by regulations. It is expected that the higher subsidy rates for younger children will incentivise childcare providers to increase the availability

of places for children less than 3 years old in particular.

Earlier this year I announced a capital funding scheme that will provide €3 million for additional childcare places for children in the 0-5 age range, which may include provision for children aged less than 3.

In addition, I have established The Early Years Forum to allow these, and other issues of relevance, to be discussed with key stakeholders in the sector. The Forum has enabled consultation and engagement between me, key officials from my Department, and key representatives of the sector. My Department has established three sub-groups to provide recommendations on how to address issues raised during Forum meetings.

One of these sub-groups, the Under 3's working sub-group of the Early Years Forum, has been tasked with identifying practical, impactful measures which could be implemented to support and sustain provision for children aged up to three years in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This sub-group has already met on three occasions and I am looking forward to receiving their recommendations.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

31. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of her commitment to a process of transitional justice for survivors of mother and baby homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22307/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My commitment to a Transitional Justice approach is intended to directly support the cohort of unmarried mothers and their children who were resident for a time in a Mother and Baby Home or County Home. While the independent statutory investigation progresses its work, I wish to develop complementary gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms which could support and empower former residents of these institutions and their families. The focus will be to further acknowledge the experiences of former residents and to enhance public awareness and understanding of a range of past abuses and human rights failures.

As previously outlined I have asked Dr. James Gallen of the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, to map out a potential model of 'transitional justice' as a means of giving voice to former residents of Mother and Baby Homes and County Homes. Dr Gallen is currently preparing a framework document to inform my deliberations which will be submitted to the Department in the coming weeks.

The work of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters is a vital step in the process to establish the facts of what happened to vulnerable women and children in these institutions. The transitional justice approach is intended to complement the work already significantly advanced by the Commission.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 8.

Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 25.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

34. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she and her Department have identified potential threats to children and young

persons, including children with special needs; the extent to which adequate staff are available to her office to ensure full and rapid investigation; the identification of issues such as cyber abuse or other issues deemed to affect the stability and security of young persons; if she anticipates the introduction of further regulations to address such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22328/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to assure the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, deals immediately with emergency cases, including for instance, if a child has been abandoned or is in immediate physical danger or at immediate risk of sexual abuse. Social work duty teams keep high priority cases under review by regularly checking to ascertain risk to the child, and where necessary will reprioritise the case. I would note that the issue of internet safety, including the making of any regulations, generally comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. However, officials from my Department are aware of such potential threats including the sexual exploitation of young people. These concerns were taken into consideration in the development of the new Children First Guidelines.

A joint protocol for interagency collaboration has been recently published together by Tusla and the HSE and both agencies are committed to implementing it across the country. The protocol clarifies the separate and distinct roles, responsibilities and legal requirements of both agencies and will ensure joint and effective management of the transition of young people with a disability and / or complex mental health issues to adult services. The objective of the protocol is to provide clarity for children and families whose needs cross between the HSE and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. It also seeks, among other things, to ensure that services are child and family centred and eliminate the potential for fragmentation or duplication. This is a highly significant protocol governing how children in care and young people in aftercare access disability-related services. The Protocol also provides for a clear escalation process that can be used by Tusla or the HSE should an issue arise, or if there is an unresolved matter regarding access to appropriate, available services.

Each referral received by Tusla is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team. 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.

Road Traffic Legislation

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of comments by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in 2015 regarding software costing €6.5 million that had been purchased and was to be ready in late 2016 to help prove delivery of fixed charge notices; the status of this software; if it is in use; the parameters of this software; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22490/17]

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of issuing fixed charge notices in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the estimated cost of issuing fixed charge notices by registered post based on the numbers issued in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22489/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 35 and 43 together.

In so far as Question 35 is concerned, I am happy to report that the primary legislation necessary to underpin the third payment option from a technical perspective, the Courts (No. 2) Bill 2016, completed its passage in the Seanad yesterday, 10 May 2017 and has now concluded its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas. Following the signature of the new legislation by the President, a commencement order will be made to commence this legislation on 1 June 2017 along with the commencement of the third payment option itself via the commencement of Part 3 of the Road Traffic Act 2010, as amended. The implementation of the third payment option has involved ongoing collaboration between a number of key stakeholders - An Garda Síochána, Courts Service, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and my Department - and will be the culmination of a number of years work. The project has been overseen by the Criminal Justice (Fixed Charge Processing System) Working Group, jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and has been a standing agenda item at the Working Group's meetings.

It is anticipated that the commencement of the third payment option will lead to a further increase in fixed charge amount payment rates, as a result of the provision of an additional/third opportunity to pay the fixed charge amount. In addition, the commencement of Section 38 of the 2010 Act on 1 June 2017 as part of the suite of fixed charge offences/FCN provisions for commencement under Part 3 of the 2010 Act, will provide that FCN service can be exercised by posting the FCN to the alleged offender. In addition, certain presumptions have also been provided for, where the matter proceeds before the Courts, allowing for evidence of postage to be provided by An Post (or another post provider) to assist the presiding judge to challenge oral evidence whereby the accused claims not to have received the FCN in the post. The introduction of the third payment option is also expected to impact on summons service by bringing about a reduction in the volume of road traffic offence cases proceeding to court.

In tandem with the third payment option, I can also inform the Deputy that work is under-way in Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to progress the Master Licence Record (MLR) project, which will entail linking the vehicle and driving licence database of the National Vehicle Driver File. The project will facilitate the application of penalty points to driving licences, thereby improving the effectiveness of road traffic enforcement measures. To enable the MLR, multiple system and process changes will need to be implemented across a number of organisations, including the Courts Service, which will take some time to design and develop. The Working Group is also responsible for monitoring and overseeing progress on the MLR project and the provision of a progress report on the Master Licence Record project is a standing agenda item at the Group's meetings.

I have requested a Garda report on the matters referred to in the Deputy's Question 43 and will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

Courts Service Data

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the annual cost of a company's (details supplied) speed vans since the contract was awarded to it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22398/17]

37. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of speeding fixed charge notices issued by a company (details supplied) each year since the contract was awarded to the consortium; the number of those fixed charge notices that

were paid on time annually; the number that progressed to court annually; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22399/17]

38. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of speeding fixed charge notices issued by a company (details supplied) that progressed to court annually; the number per district court which have resulted in conviction annually; the number which have been struck out per District Court and the reason for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22400/17]

39. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of speeding fixed charge notices issued by a company's (details supplied) speed vans that progressed to conviction in court annually, per District Court; the number per District Court of persons that had their licence numbers recorded upon conviction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22401/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 36 to 39, inclusive, together.

I have requested a Garda report on the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

I can inform the Deputy that the Courts Service is not in a position to provide the courts data requested in the Deputy's questions, as Courts Service systems cannot differentiate between "Speed Vans" operated by the named company and those operated by An Garda Síochána.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

40. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to seek a review of the UNCHR policy in relation to resettlements of refugees here and other countries with respect to the policy of deprioritising of children with long term illnesses for resettlement in view of a recent report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22410/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): While Ireland works closely with the UNHCR in relation to resettling refugees here, the policies adopted by the UNHCR in seeking to carry out its vital work are of course a matter for that organisation. I understand, however, that the UNHCR strives to identify the people most in need of resettlement, and that it generally prioritises refugees for resettlement based on vulnerability criteria, such as women and girls at risk, people with disabilities and health needs, and survivors of torture.

Road Traffic Offences Data

41. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic offences before the courts in each of the years 2015 to 2016, and to date in 2017 in which automatic number plate recognition data was used; the number of convictions that resulted from these cases; the number struck out and the reasons for strike out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22487/17]

42. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of criminal offences before the courts in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in which automatic number plate recognition data was used; the number of convictions

that resulted from these cases; the number struck out and the reasons for strike out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22488/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 41 and 42 together.

I sought a report from Courts Service in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and can inform the Deputy that the Courts Service is not in a position to supply the information sought. The reason for this is that Courts Service systems cannot differentiate between prosecutions arising through the use of automatic number plate recognition data and any other methods of number plate recognition, for example, an intercept by An Garda Síochána where the number plate recognition is by Garda eyesight.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 35.

EU Regulations

44. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if Ireland will opt out of the proposed reforms to the common European asylum system and in particular to the proposed Dublin regulation, the asylum procedures regulation, reception conditions directive, the European Union agency for asylum regulation and the qualification regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22526/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In May and July of last year, the European Commission published two packages of measures to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) – seven legislative proposals in total, including those referred to by the Deputy in her question.

These measures aim to address the identified shortcomings in the current CEAS, which were exposed during the migration crisis, most notably in 2015, when the number of people arriving in the EU to claim protection reached its highest levels since the end of World War II.

Under the EU Ordinary Legislative Procedure, both the Council and the European Parliament as co-legislators will adopt the Commission's proposals, following their negotiation. This complex process of negotiation is ongoing, both at the Asylum Working Party level for the Council and by the Parliament's appointed Rapporteurs in the preparation of their Committee Reports. All seven proposals are considerably inter-linked and are being discussed in parallel to ensure a cohesive outcome to the reform process. We are playing an active role in these negotiations. In addition, progress on the negotiation of the CEAS reforms is regularly discussed at the meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council and at the European Council.

Under Article 4 of Protocol No. 21 annexed to the TEU and to the TFEU, Ireland can notify the Council and the Commission of its wish to opt in to a measure at any time after its adoption. As the texts of the proposals have yet to be finalised and adopted, no decision has been taken as to whether or not we will opt in to any of the measures. Any future decision to opt in to a measure, having fully considered all of the potential implications for our own international protection process, which has recently been fundamentally reformed by the introduction of the International Protection Act, will be subject to the approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Immigration Data

45. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of applications made under section 18(4)(a) of the Refugee Act, 1996 in each of the years 2013 to 2016; the number of successful applications for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22537/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that statistics are not maintained in a way which distinguishes between section 18(3)(a) and 18(4)(a) applications under the Refugee Act 1996. Overall, there have been around 2,400 applications during the period and it would take a disproportionate amount of resources to manually compile the figures requested by the Deputy thus diverting staff from the core task of application processing.

Gambling Legislation

46. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the steps she has taken in relation to strengthening the Fraud Act 2001 with regard to gambling on sporting events; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22541/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Part 2 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001 (as amended) deals with theft and related offences. For instance, section 6 of the Act provides that a person who dishonestly, with the intention of making a gain for himself or herself or another, or of causing loss to another, by any deception induces another to do or refrain from doing an act is guilty of an offence. A person guilty of an offence under section 6 is liable on conviction on indictment to a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or both. While I do not have any plans at present to amend the legislation in question, I will continue to keep the matter under review.

I might add that, as has been recently conveyed to the House, it remains the intention to proceed with gambling legislation at the earliest opportunity. The preparation of a Gambling Control Bill continues on that basis. However, it should be acknowledged that it will require some significant updating to take account of developments since 2013, when the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill was published. The preparation of the legislation will be a major and complex undertaking.

Gambling Legislation

47. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the Gambling Control Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22542/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As I have previously conveyed to the House, it remains the intention to proceed with gambling legislation at the earliest opportunity including under the powers of the Minister for Justice and Equality under the gaming and lotteries legislation which have been delegated to me as Minister of State. The preparation of a Gambling Control Bill, and of a number of related early measures for inclusion in the General Scheme of the forthcoming Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, continues on that basis. I intend to move forward as quickly as possible with the appropriate measures on both of these fronts. I can also confirm that it remains my intention to bring forward the main Gambling Control Bill for government approval and publication later this year.

Work on the preparation of the General Scheme of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscella-

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

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

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

Along with officials of my Department, I am continuing to consult with relevant stakeholders. In that spirit, I look forward to discussing quite soon the gambling measures that will be contained in the General Scheme of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and, after that, to discussing the main Gambling Control Bill when it, in turn, is approved by Government for publication.

Residency Permits

48. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which procedures can be put in place to regularise the residency as per submissions in relation to persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22591/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applications for residency, in respect of the persons mentioned by the Deputy, are currently under consideration and that INIS will be writing out to the persons concerned very shortly.

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

Residency Permits

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will confirm receipt of the up to date relevant information by the appropriate sector in her Department in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22592/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for residency for the person concerned was received and is currently under consideration. INIS will be writing to the person concerned shortly.

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

Deportation Orders

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if permission will be granted to remain or regularisation of residency in the form of naturalisation will be finalised in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22594/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 27th May, 2009 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations have been received from the legal representative of the person concerned, pursuant to section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting the revocation of the Deportation Order. This request will be considered on its merits. The Deputy may wish to note that the decision to ensue from any such consideration will be to have the existing Deportation Order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this will be notified in writing. In the meantime, 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 by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the case for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [22595/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed by persons (details supplied) to facilitate update of stamp 4, in view of the fact that the service is not available from the local immigration officer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22596/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the officials of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that registration for people living outside Dublin city and county is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

In the case of the individual referred to by the Deputy, they must apply to Leixlip Garda station for renewal of their Stamp 4 status.

Might I remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been 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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to updating stamp 4 temporary residency or if another facility can be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) who has been signing on at the local Garda

station for many years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22602/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made on 11 March 2005, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The person concerned, through their legal representative, has made a request to have that Deportation Order revoked, based on the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order.

The person concerned, again through their legal representative, has also sought to be re-admitted to the asylum/protection process and the initial decision in this regard is currently under review. Once a final decision has been arrived at, it will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision in this instance will be to readmit, or refuse to readmit, the person concerned to the asylum/protection process.

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

Immigration Status

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22603/17]

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 this person's request for immigration permission is currently under consideration and INIS will be writing to the person concerned very shortly.

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

Residency Permits

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date and procedures yet to be followed to validate and extend residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22604/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was refused a residence card on 14 November 2016 under the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015.

I am further informed that INIS only received an application for review of that decision very recently. I understand that INIS will write to the person concerned shortly in connection with the next stage of the review process.

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

Immigration Status

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22606/17]

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 persons concerned have had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further three year period to 11th and 23rd March 2019 respectively. This decision was conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by registered post dated 23rd March 2016.

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.

Immigration Status

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the case to refuse family reunification will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22608/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 20th June, 2002. As the Deputy will be aware, the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person named on the Order must leave the State and remain thereafter outside the State.

The person concerned made a request, pursuant to the provisions of section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to have that Order revoked. Following the detailed consideration of that request, the Deportation Order was 'affirmed' on 25th April, 2016. Therefore, the Order remains valid and in place. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is an operational

matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Naturalisation Applications

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the case notwithstanding previous refusals in respect of their application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22609/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was deemed ineligible for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 4 May 2017.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which the person concerned may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Visa Applications

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed with a view to achieving spousal reunion in the case of a person (details supplied) in view of the existence of some evidence to support their application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22611/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an appeal was received by the Visa Office in Dublin on 3 May, 2017 and is now awaiting examination by a Visa Appeals Officer. All documentation submitted with the original application and any additional information will be considered by the Appeals Officer.

As with all visa application processes, an appeal is dealt with in chronological order based on the date received in the Visa Office. The time-frame for the appeal to be processed may be

affected by the complexity of the case, the number of appeals received, and the available resources. While every effort is made to process appeals as quickly as possible, processing times can inevitably vary. It is expected that a decision will issue to the applicant within the next 4 to 6 weeks.

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

Immigration Status

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22615/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy made an application to INIS, at the beginning of February 2017, for permission to remain in the State, as the spouse of an Irish National and that this application is currently being processed. All applications are dealt with in strict chronological order; the processing time is currently approximately 12 months.

I wish to refer the Deputy to his previous Parliamentary Question Ref. No. 17334/17, which was answered on 4 April 2017. The position remains unchanged.

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

Naturalisation Applications

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied). [22617/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a final decision on the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy has been deferred until November 2019. The person concerned was notified of this decision and the reasons for it in a letter issued on 14 March 2017.

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

preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Banking Sector

62. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the progress on the programme for Government commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well defined regions; and the key elements under this model that facilitate accessible lending to enterprises and promote SME growth. [22641/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to thoroughly investigate the Sparkassen model of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) is the lead Department in respect of this commitment. DAHRRGA undertook a consultation process, engaging with stakeholders and interested parties, which finished at the end of March of this year. As part of this consultation process, meetings were held with Sparkassen, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland.

Officials from my Department are assisting DAHRRGA to prepare a report for the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and myself setting out the findings and conclusions of this investigation into the key elements of the Sparkassen model of local public banking as it relates to SMEs. It is anticipated that this report will be completed by mid-year.

As the Deputy will be aware, SMEs can access lower cost, flexible finance from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). To the end of December 2016, the SBCI has lent €544 million to 12,593 SMEs. The SBCI's goal is to increase the availability of funding to SMEs at a lower cost and on more flexible terms than has been available in recent times on the Irish market. The SBCI uses an on-lending model; this means it does not lend directly to SMEs. At present, the SBCI has 3 bank and 5 non-bank on-lenders. The SMEs who received SBCI finance are from a variety of business and economic sectors. More than 80% of loans are for investment purposes and the average loan size is €43,200. There is a broad regional spread of the SMEs supported, with 84.8% of them based outside Dublin.

The Deputy may also wish to note that there are already significant Government measures to support the financing needs of SMEs. As well as the SBCI, there is the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices and the Credit Review Office.

The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is a cross-government initiative. By answering eight simple questions, SMEs will receive a tailored list of available Government supports to suit their needs. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at www.supportingsmes.ie.

The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. Further information is available on the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation website.

The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, is an additional

source of credit that provides loans for up to €25,000 to start-up, newly established, or growing micro enterprises employing less than 10 people. Microfinance Ireland works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices nationally to administer this fund (www.microfinanceireland.ie).

The Credit Review Office (CRO) is another government initiative that helps SMEs who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by the main banks, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. This is a strictly confidential process between the business, the Credit Review Office and the bank. The CRO overturns more than 50% of appeals it receives. Further details are available at www.creditreview.ie.

The Deputy may rest assured that it is a key Government strategy to ensure State supports enable the growth of Irish SMEs by facilitating access to credit and promoting investment in SMEs.

Private Rented Accommodation

63. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of the working group on tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers; the number of times the group has met; the sectorial inputs it has received or requested, other than the public consultation; the timeline for the group to produce a final report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22405/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Strategy for the Rental Sector, published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in December 2016, committed to the establishment of a working group in early 2017 to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers), and to put forward options, where appropriate, for amendments to such treatment. This working group was set up in January 2017, is chaired by the Department of Finance and its membership consists of officials from the Tax and Economics Divisions of the Department of Finance; the Revenue Commissioners; the Housing Division of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG); and the Residential Tenancies Board.

As notified to the Deputy previously, there was an opportunity for all interested parties to engage with the Working Group as part of the targeted public consultation which was conducted over four weeks from Friday 10 March to Friday 7 April 2017. The consultation paper asked ten targeted questions which covered subjects such as mortgage interest relief, capital repayment relief, rental accommodation as a pension investment, the deductibility of various expenses, Capital Gains Tax, long-term tenancies, accidental landlords, the Rent-a-Room Scheme and vacant properties. Individuals had the option to answer any, all, or none of the questions, when making their submissions. The public consultation received almost 70 written submissions from a wide range of interested parties, including individual landlords, representative bodies and charitable organisations. A number of representatives from the sector were also invited to a meeting of the working group to discuss and present on relevant issues from their perspectives.

To date, the Working Group has met five times and a sixth meeting is scheduled for early next week. It is estimated that the report of the Working Group will be presented to me by the end of July 2017, to allow for consideration of any of the options put forward, as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018.

64. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Central Bank rules when dealing with credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22467/17]

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 myself, as Minister for Finance, are working together for the safety of members' savings and the security of the credit union sector.

The Central Bank informed me that they are prevented by legislation from discussing individual regulated firms and are therefore not in a position to discuss details about their supervisory engagement with individual credit unions.

However, the Central Bank has informed me that adequate reserves support a credit union's operations, provide a base for future growth and protect against the risk of unforeseen losses. Credit unions need to maintain sufficient reserves to ensure continuity and to protect members' savings. The regulatory reserve requirement (capital requirement) for credit unions is the amount required to be held in the regulatory reserve of a credit union, expressed as a percentage of the assets of a credit union. All credit unions are required to maintain a minimum regulatory reserve of at least 10% of the assets of the credit union. Credit union reserves comprise retained earnings from current and previous years, which limits their ability to raise reserves as they do not have the ability to raise capital through other means. Reserves available to a credit union for the purposes of the Regulatory Reserve Requirement must be realised, unrestricted and non-distributable to ensure they are capable of absorbing losses.

The Report of the Commission on Credit Unions, published in April 2012, sets out detailed governance standards for credit unions. The majority of these governance standards were reflected in the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 which provides a legislative framework to improve governance standards in credit unions with a particular focus on those who exercise significant influence and control in a credit union i.e. board of directors and the management team. The Commission on Credit Unions also made recommendations in relation to the introduction of fitness and probity for credit unions. In 2013, a tailored version of the Fitness and Probity regime applying to all other regulated financial service providers was introduced for credit unions and is now fully implemented.

Credit union members should have confidence that those individuals holding senior positions in credit unions can demonstrate that they are competent and capable, act honestly, ethically and with integrity and are financially sound. Under the Fitness and Probity regime for credit unions an individual is required to have and to demonstrate the competence necessary to perform specified functions. This is normally tested with regard to the relevant experience of the individual and/or relevant qualifications.

I am satisfied that in the performance of her regulatory and supervisory functions, the Registrar of Credit Unions is working in the best interests of individual credit unions, their members

and the sector as a whole.

This Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement in Ireland and the Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall and it is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement.

Tax Data

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the average income tax paid by PAYE workers on the standard rate of tax and by PAYE workers on the higher rate of tax in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22472/17]

66. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the average income tax paid by PAYE workers on the standard rate of tax and by PAYE workers on the higher rate of tax in the private sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22473/17]

67. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the average income tax paid by persons in self-employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22474/17]

68. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the average income tax paid by farm households in which the main income is derived from farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22475/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 to 68, inclusive, together.

I am informed by Revenue that, on the basis of information derived from Income Tax returns filed for the year 2014, the latest year for which data are available, the average Income Tax paid by public sector PAYE workers on the standard and higher rate of tax is €3,727 and €19,578 respectively. The average paid by private sector PAYE workers on the standard and higher rate is €3,078 and €22,538 respectively.

The distinction between public and private sector PAYE workers involves a degree of estimation using the activity description of the employers. The averages are calculated on the basis of taxpayer units that include jointly assessed taxpayers as one unit. Tax paid is Income Tax only and does not include USC. The average is calculated on all sources of income and a taxpayer is deemed to be a PAYE worker if over half their income is PAYE income. Tax exempt employees have been excluded. For the purpose of this calculation, taxpayers on marginal relief and taxpayers whose nominal liability at the higher rate is fully covered by their tax credits have been counted as being at the standard rate.

The average Income Tax paid by Self Employed (Schedule D) persons in 2014 on the standard and higher rate of tax is €3,630 and €42,254 respectively, with an overall average of €12,595. These averages are calculated on the basis of taxpayer units that include jointly assessed taxpayers as one unit. Tax paid is Income Tax only and does not include USC. The average is calculated on all sources of income and a taxpayer is deemed to be a self employed if over half their income is non-PAYE income. Tax exempt persons have been excluded. For the purpose of this calculation, taxpayers on marginal relief and taxpayers whose nominal liability at the higher rate is fully covered by their tax credits have been counted as being at the standard rate.

I am advised by Revenue that taxpayer returns are not furnished in a manner which would

enable the calculation of the average income tax paid by a farm 'household'. However it may be of interest to the Deputy that Revenue have published a report on "The Farming Sector in Ireland: A Profile from Revenue Data" and a subsequent update, both available at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/research/statistical-reports.html> that presents a statistical analysis of farmers from the perspective of Revenue data.

Corporate Governance

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reform the standards of corporate governance in investment fund management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22476/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for the authorisation and supervision of fund management companies established in Ireland.

I have been informed by the Bank that it has undertaken a significant project examining fund management company effectiveness which dealt with the issue of governance by aiming to enhance organisational effectiveness and setting out expectations with regard to how directors of fund management companies should carry out their roles.

That work concluded in December 2016 when the Central Bank published its finalised guidance for fund management companies and new rules on managerial functions, organisational effectiveness, effective supervision requirement/location of directors and Designated Persons and retrievability of records.

Fund management companies now have a period of time within which to make any changes necessary to comply with the new rules and to operate in a manner consistent with the new guidance.

Revenue Commissioners

70. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if price data for land purchases are filed with the Revenue Commissioners; if so, the circumstances under which this is collected, for example, as part of stamp duty requirements; if it is usually filed electronically; if the zoning, area, current primary use or other details of the land in question are collected as part of the same process; and the location which the price data and other data is currently published. [22521/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that information regarding purchases of land (non-residential / commercial property) is collected by Revenue through Stamp Duty returns that are filed via Revenue's e-Stamping System.

In relation to land the filer must indicate if the land falls within any of the following categories –

- Site only
- Agricultural land
- Non-Agricultural land
- New Commercial / Industrial Premises

- Second-hand Commercial / Industrial Premises.

The address of the property must be provided together with the land area in hectares where the land is site only, agricultural land or non-agricultural land. Data in relation to zoning or current primary use is not captured.

Certain information collected by Revenue from returns filed in respect of non-residential property is exchanged with the Valuation Office and the Central Statistics Office. Certain information collected by Revenue from Stamp Duty returns relating to the purchase of residential property is exchanged with the Property Services Regulatory Authority and the Central Statistics Office.

Universal Social Charge

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated net cost per annum of USC changes announced in budget 2017 in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22539/17]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is reassessing the total cost of USC cuts announced in budget 2017; the estimated impact that this will have on the fiscal space in 2017 and 2018; if such a reassessment will impact on the State's compliance with EU fiscal obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22540/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 72 together.

The estimated first year (i.e. 2017) cost of the USC measures contained in Budget 2017 was €335 million, and the estimated full-year cost of the USC measures was €390 million, with 2018 being the first full year in which the measures are in effect.

While overall income tax receipts are currently below profile, down 3.1% or €198 million at end-April 2017, it should be noted that we were in a similar position at the same point in 2016, when one-off payments, c. €100 million are excluded, revenues were down 1.5% or €94 million against profile. However, due to a pick-up in receipts throughout the remainder of year, income tax finished 2016 ahead of target.

It is important to point out that income tax encompasses a broad range of elements, some of which are not directly impacted by employment or wage developments. These include Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Life Assurance Exit Tax, Dividend Withholding Tax, Professional Services Withholding Tax and Back Duty. These payments can be 'lumpy' in nature and the timing of payments can vary from year to year. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the majority of these specific components are having a drag on overall income tax receipts in the first four months of 2017. In relation to income tax (PAYE), the most significant component of overall income tax, it closed the first third of the year, broadly in-line with profile, down just 0.6% or c. €25 million.

Notwithstanding this, the performance of USC is lower-than-expected, and my Department is currently reviewing the performance of income tax in 2017, in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners. The initial indications are that Revenue is satisfied that the overall estimate of the Budget 2017, Universal Social Charges (USC) changes of €335 million in 2017, were costed accurately.

At the time of Budget 2017, the apportionment of the total USC package between PAYE and

Schedule D was allocated by my Department at €263 million and €72 million respectively, in line with previous norms. However, subsequent analysis by Revenue, indicates that the allocation of the USC package between PAYE and Schedule D should have been €311 million and €24 million in favour of PAYE and Schedule D respectively, due to the dynamics of the USC package. While, this is helping to explain the current under-performance against profile, it is important to point out that this reapportionment should have no adverse impact on the overall collection of USC receipts as this should equalise later in the year.

However, my Department along with the Revenue Commissioners will continue to examine this issue and consider all relevant developments.

Finally, with regards to State's compliance with EU fiscal obligations, Government policy as outlined in the recently published Stability Programme Update, still remains oriented to achieve our medium term objective of a structural budget balance, which we are projected to achieve in 2018.

Motor Insurance

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons that applied on an annual basis to the declined cases agreement for motor insurance since its establishment; the number of applications that proved successful; the average premium per successful application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22553/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset, the Deputy should note that as Minister for Finance, I am not responsible for the operation of the Declined Cases Agreement and therefore do not have direct access to the data that is being requested.

As you are aware, under the Declined Cases Agreement, the insurance market undertakes not to refuse to provide third party motor insurance to an individual where they have approached at least three insurers. This is necessary given the mandatory nature of third party motor insurance in Ireland. Insurance Ireland operates the Declined Cases Agreement on a voluntary basis as a means of ensuring that persons seeking motor insurance will obtain cover. The Agreement is only triggered if an individual is unable to obtain a quotation in the open market, i.e. a person has to have approached at least three insurers without being able to obtain cover from them.

In order to be as helpful as I can, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland about your information request. In response they have provided me with statistics on the number of cases they have dealt with which are set out in the table below. In relation to these cases Insurance Ireland has informed me that they secured a quotation for the applicants in question through the Agreement and that they therefore consider all of these applications to have been successful. With regard to information on the average premium per successful application, I am informed that this is a matter for individual insurers and that this information is therefore not recorded by Insurance Ireland.

Year	No. of Cases
2016	1941
2015	1164
2014	669
2013	308
2012	178
2011	169

Year	No. of Cases
2010	130
2009	115
2008	53
2007	72
2006	152
2005	246
2004	310
2003	379
2002	393
2001	478
2000	328
1999	329
1998	297
1997	306
1996	348
1995	350

It should be noted that the Cost of Insurance Working Group examined the issue of the Declined Cases Agreement, on foot of receiving a number of submissions and queries from individuals about its operation. In light of feedback from members of the public, the Working Group recommended that the Declined Cases Agreement process should be made more transparent. In this regard, Insurance Ireland are scheduled to provide a report by the end of June and annually thereafter to my Department on the operation of the Agreement, including on the cases submitted and resolved, and also on cases where a premium and/or terms are so excessive as to be tantamount to a refusal. The Working Group also recommended that Insurance Ireland should provide further information on its website with regard to the recourse a consumer should have in cases where there is not a satisfactory outcome through the Declined Cases Agreement. The first quarterly report on the implementation of the CIWG's recommendations has reported that Insurance Ireland has made the necessary alterations to its website in order to provide more prominent information in respect of the Declined Cases Agreement on the home page and that work has commenced on their first annual report on the operation of the agreement.

Tax Credits

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if arrangements will be made to transfer tax credits to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22612/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the person concerned has been previously informed by Revenue of what needs to be done to transfer the tax credits concerned. This information has been provided in recent days again. Once the necessary steps are completed, Revenue will be able to complete its consideration of the matter.

Banking Sector Remuneration

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the

remuneration cap in place for bank executives; the nature of the cap; his future plans in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22648/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The previous Government put in place a policy which restricts remuneration in the banks in which the State had to inject capital during the financial crisis. This policy has been in place since mid-2011. In brief, remuneration in State supported banks is capped at €500,000 (excluding normal pension entitlements) and no form of remuneration with any variable pay component(s), can be awarded or paid. This policy remains in place and I have no immediate plans to alter it.

However, as I indicated recently, given the State's minority shareholding in Bank of Ireland, should the bank's preferred candidate for CEO be an external individual of the required calibre and with the necessary experience for the role, I would be willing to consider an exception to the pay cap consistent with the terms of the outgoing CEO's remuneration package.

In addition to the pay restrictions that are currently in place as part of Irish Government policy, it is important to acknowledge the wider European regulatory changes to bankers remuneration that have been implemented since the banking crisis. This includes a number of changes to the framework that applies to bonus payments (including salaries and discretionary pension benefits) to staff of relevant institutions. The introduction of the framework in 2014 and enforced by the relevant competent authorities across Europe is designed to ensure that the excessive risk taking culture and short term focus on targets seen prior to 2008 is not repeated.

Banking Sector Investigations

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to the regulatory breaches that led to the Central Bank's recent fine of €2.275 million against a bank (details supplied), if specific breaches have been referred to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22650/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has various reporting obligations in circumstances where the information obtained by it at any stage prior to, during, or after an Investigation, gives rise to a suspicion of a criminal offence, a breach of company law, or a breach of competition law. In such circumstances, the Central Bank has an obligation to refer the matter to the relevant authority, as prescribed under Section 33AK(3) of the Central Bank Act 1942, as amended. Relevant authorities include An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners, the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Competition Authority, and the National Consumer Agency.

I am awaiting an update from the Central Bank on the case referred to here and I will let the Deputy know the outcome of this as soon as is appropriate.

Tracker Mortgages Examination

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amounts paid out to date and the provisions made by each bank covered by the Central Bank's tracker examination, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22651/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland published a report providing an update on the Examination of Tracker Mortgage Related Issues on 23 March.

11 May 2017

As set out in the report/update, as at end February 2017,

- approximately 9,900 customer accounts have been identified as impacted by lenders, as part of the Examination;

- lenders have commenced contacting the identified impacted customers and have rectified the interest rates applied to such impacted customers' accounts, thus stopping further detriment (as at the date of the Report, interest rates have been rectified on more than 90% of the accounts that require such rectification);

- approximately €78m has been paid in redress and compensation to approximately 2,600 impacted customers identified as part of the Examination.

The Central Bank has been publishing updates as the Examination progresses and a further update will be published in autumn 2017.

Due to statutory confidentiality requirements, the Central Bank has advised that it may not publicly disclose much of its supervisory engagement with individual firms. In particular, the Central Bank can, generally speaking, only disclose such information in summary or aggregate form, so that individual firms cannot be identified. The Central Bank has to be careful that any public disclosures made by it do not breach its statutory confidentiality requirements or prejudice any ongoing or possible future supervisory or enforcement actions. It is a matter for each individual lender to decide whether or not to disclose provisions made in respect of the Examination.

Tax Data

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number and value of voluntary disclosures the Revenue Commissioners have received in respect of the offshore assets prior to the deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22652/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In my Financial Statement to the House on 11 October 2016, I indicated that I would act to restrict the opportunity for tax defaulters to use the voluntary disclosure regime with effect from May 2017. In line with this undertaking, section 56 of the Finance Act 2016 provides that, as and from the voluntary disclosure deadline date, the making of a qualifying disclosure will not be possible where the tax liabilities involved relate to offshore matters.

The period during which qualifying disclosures could be made to Revenue in relation to offshore matters ended on Thursday 4 May 2017. Disclosures are still being processed and the final figure will not be available until next week. I am advised by Revenue that the number of disclosures processed exceeds 2,300, with a value of more than €70 million.

Anybody who has tax liabilities relating to offshore matters and who did not act to address them by 4 May 2017 now faces the prospect of substantially higher penalties, publication in the Quarterly List of Tax Defaulters and possible prosecution. Revenue has advised me that it is committed to making full and effective use of the considerable amounts of data on offshore accounts, structures and assets that will be available to them, through international arrangements for Automatic Exchange of Information, to pursue rigorously anybody who attempts to use such means to evade their tax obligations.

Money Laundering

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the level of engagement with inspectors from the financial action task force by officials from his Department and officials in the Central Bank as part of the task force's investigation into money laundering and the financing of terrorism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22653/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body that sets global standards to assist its member countries to combat money laundering and terrorist financing activities. In a seven to ten year cycle, the FATF organises peer-reviews of its member countries Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) measures. As part of this process, it conducts an in-depth examination of all legal, regulatory and operational measures recommended by the standards at that particular time.

Ireland was reviewed in 2006 (3rd round evaluation), and was required to take a series of follow-up actions which were signed off by FATF in 2013. The focus of that review was on technical compliance, i.e. ensuring that our legislation was aligned with FATF standards.

Ireland is now undergoing a new 'mutual evaluation review' ("MER") under the FATF's 4th round. There is a significant change in emphasis in this round, and much more attention is being paid to the effectiveness of a country's AML/CFT systems. The first step in the review process was to prepare both a technical compliance submission and an effectiveness one in order to provide FATF with a good understanding of our system and how it operates.

In addition, a key aspect of the new assessment approach is that countries are required to have a much better understanding of the money laundering (ML) and terrorist financing (TF) risks they face. Consequently there was a requirement for Ireland to conduct an extensive national risk assessment ("NRA") exercise in this area. The NRA of ML/TF risks was published in October 2016 and can be found at the following link:

-<http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/NRA%20FINAL%20for%20Publication.pdf>

The NRA was prepared under the auspices of the Anti-Money Laundering Steering Committee (AMLSC), a multi-agency body chaired by the Department of Finance. The AMLSC's membership includes the Central Bank, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) within the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB), the Officer of the Revenue Commissioners, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB), as well as a number of other relevant Departments and bodies.

The Department of Finance, in its capacity as chair of the AMLSC and head of the Irish delegation to the FATF, coordinated and hosted the FATF's two week onsite assessment of Ireland's AML/CFT framework in November 2016. During this time the main AMLSC members and representatives from the private sector, met with the FATF assessors in a series of meetings which covered issues such as our understanding of AML/CFT risk, supervision of the financial and non-financial areas for these risks including preventative actions been taken by 'designated persons' such as credit institutions, the practical application of our AML/CFT legislation etc.

The FATF's MER, which will be formally signed off in June, seeks therefore to gain a holistic view of the effectiveness of the Irish AML/CFT regime. Once finalised the MER will be published on-line as an external assessment of Ireland's AML/CFT systems.

Whilst the Department cannot comment on the results of the assessment or the contents of the draft MER in advance of finalisation at the June 2017 FATF Plenary meeting, we are

satisfied with how the assessment has been conducted, and are confident that the report will be constructive for Irish AML/CFT policy going forward.

NAMA Investigations

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he, in the course of a meeting he attended with NAMA on 5 February 2014, requested NAMA to consider whether it could advance the repayment schedule of senior bonds through accelerating asset disposals with a view to making bank assets more saleable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22655/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that I, as Minister, do not have a role in NAMA's commercial decisions. However, while respecting NAMA's independence, I and my officials regularly engage with NAMA regarding its performance and strategy.

I maintain a regular dialogue with the NAMA Chairman and receive appropriate updates regarding NAMA's ongoing progress and future plans. I also meet on occasion with the NAMA Board, which provides me with an opportunity to share my views and understand the Board's views.

Turning to the specific question, I assume the Deputy is referring to the article published on 16 April 2017 in the Sunday Times, referencing my attendance at a NAMA Board strategy day on 5 February 2014. That article makes reference to NAMA's memo of the away day, which was released by NAMA under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. I provide below the text of relevant section of NAMA's memo to which the Deputy refers:

"The Minister noted that following Ireland's emergence from the Bailout Programme, one of the Government's key priorities was to reduce Ireland's debt to GDP ratio from the current 120% to the European average of 94%. The Minister noted the wider implications and impact of NAMA's performance for the country and particularly for the banks. In this context he noted that the proceeds from a sale of Ireland's bank shares could be used to reduce the national debt and requested that NAMA consider whether it could advance the repayment schedule of Senior Bonds through accelerating asset disposals with a view to making bank assets more saleable."

Though this is NAMA's note of the meeting and not my own, I do not disagree with their summary of the sentiment I expressed.

It is important to place these comments in the context of what was happening more broadly at the time. Ireland's debt to GDP was around 120%, excluding the State's contingent liabilities relating to NAMA and IBRC.

NAMA had achieved the major milestone of redeeming €7.5bn of its government guaranteed senior debt by YE2013 and had issued an additional €12.9bn of senior debt in support of the IBRC liquidation for which it had been directed to act as a backstop bidder.

Through concerted efforts across the economy, we had generated positive momentum around Ireland's recovery and recently had exited the EU-IMF Programme of Support in December 2013. We faced the challenge of sustaining and building upon that momentum in a way that allowed for continued debt reduction and productive investment in Ireland that facilitated not just a recovery of the FDI sector but a real recovery in the broader domestic economy. At that point we were all making decisions every day that would impact how and at what speed our underlying domestic economy would recover and we had an ongoing responsibility to remain

vigilant for opportunities to lay the foundation to accelerate a sustainable recovery of the Irish economy.

NAMA played a key role in various aspects of that sustainable recovery. NAMA's ability to meet its objectives provided clear signals to the market evidencing Ireland's recovery. NAMA bonds also remained a significant contingent liability for the State and posed a challenge to the recovery of the banks as holders of significant amounts of NAMA debt.

It was in the context of NAMA's contribution to Ireland's broader recovery - including the recovery of our banking sector - that I would have challenged NAMA to take advantage of the buoyant market dynamics to accelerate bond redemptions without threatening its objectives under the Act. By achieving its objectives expeditiously, in line with the NAMA Act, NAMA would assist in the normalisation of the Irish banks and the broader market.

These were entirely appropriate challenges to pose to the NAMA Board during its strategy day. It is important to note that my comments to the NAMA Board did not constitute an instruction nor a direction. These were challenges posed to the NAMA Board in the context of their overriding objectives as defined in the NAMA Act.

It remained a matter for the Board to assess these challenges and to determine the most appropriate strategy for fulfilling NAMA's obligations.

As the Deputy is aware there were clear interdependencies between NAMA, the banks and the wider Irish economy. In this context, it is not surprising that such linkages were a matter of discussion between the Minister for Finance and the NAMA Board at a crucial period in establishing Ireland's recovery.

The Deputy will also be aware that my officials were concurrently preparing a report under Section 227 of the NAMA Act in the period 2013-14. The report, published in July 2014, assessed the extent to which NAMA had made progress toward achieving its overall objectives and whether the continuation of NAMA was necessary for the purposes of the Act. The report concluded that NAMA had made significant progress in achieving its overall objectives, and based on its performance and financial projections in light of the strength of investor interest in Ireland, was well positioned to achieve its overall objectives and so continued to be necessary.

In the context of this report, consideration was given to various strategic alternatives that may facilitate NAMA achieving and ideally surpassing its objectives. The Section 227 Review is available on the Department of Finance website via the following link: www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/NAMA_Section_227_Review_web2.pdf.

Following that review, I fully endorsed the view of the NAMA Board that, like any rational commercial operator, it should take advantage, to the greatest extent possible, of favourable Irish market conditions by increasing the flow of assets to the market while remaining faithful to its purpose and objectives under the NAMA Act.

Finally I would point out that, as this note relates to a meeting from over 3 years ago, I was referring to potential future sales of the State's bank assets generally and not with any specific transaction in mind.

Development Lending

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of lending for development purposes, residential and commercial by regulated financial entities and unregu-

lated entities for each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [22656/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed by the Central Bank that the amount of net lending to business for development purposes in respect of residential and commercial property is as follows:

Residential

The amount of net lending for residential purposes was -€739 million in 2014. The total outstanding figure stood at €11.8 billion at the end of 2014.

The amount of net lending for residential purposes was -€898 million in 2015. The total outstanding figure stood at €4.8 billion at the end of 2015.

The amount of net lending for residential purposes was -€521 million in 2016. The total outstanding figure stood at €3.3 billion at the end of 2016.

Commercial

The amount of net lending for commercial purposes was -€657 million in 2014. The total outstanding figure stood at €12.5 billion at the end of 2014.

The amount of net lending for commercial purposes was -€962 million in 2015. The total outstanding figure stood at €10.1 billion at the end of 2015.

The amount of net lending for commercial purposes was -€762 million in 2016. The total outstanding figure stood at €8.9 billion at the end of 2016.

The data refers to lending to businesses by Irish resident banks for the purposes of 'Property investment/development of residential real estate' and 'Property investment/development of commercial real estate'.

It is sourced from the following Business Credit and Deposits Statistics Table A.14. as published by the Central Bank of Ireland.

Please note that data for 2017 has yet to be released and is set to be released in mid-June.

National Debt

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the projected annual cost for each year to 2030 of servicing the national debt under present assumptions for each year to 2030, in tabular form; the assumptions which are being made including the interest rate; the amount by which the repayments would increase for every 1% increase in the interest rate, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22657/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The most recent forecasts of both National Debt interest and General Government interest expenditure are for the period 2017 to 2021 and are contained in the recently published Stability Programme Update (SPU).

The relevant information is contained in Table A3, Annex 1 on page 51 of the SPU and is replicated in the table.

€ million	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
National Debt Interest	6,195.0	6,276.0	6,075.0	5,921.0	5,206.0
General Government Interest	6,024.0	5,956.7	5,842.2	5,596.5	5,264.2

National debt interest is the projected cash interest cost of the National debt. The General Government interest figures are prepared on an ESA10 accrual basis and represent the projected interest cost of the wider General Government measure of debt. Both sets of interest estimates are point-in-time estimates reflecting the position as at the end of the first quarter of 2017.

I am advised by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) that it does not disclose the interest rates at which it could potentially issue debt as to do so could negatively impact the Agency from raising funds for the Exchequer at the most competitive rates possible.

That said, the interest expenditure estimates reflected in the SPU are based on prudent assumptions and reflect an increase in rates over the forecast period. Finally, I should add that the vast bulk of Irish sovereign debt is at fixed interest rates, which also reduces the exposure of the economy in the event of higher rates.

Mortgage Data

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of private dwelling home, PDH, and buy-to-let tracker mortgages to date and the current annual repayments for each, in tabular form; the amount by which the repayments would increase for every 1% increase in the European Central Bank base interest rate, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22658/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised me that it does not publish data on the particular basis requested.

However, the Central Bank has indicated that, as at end-2016, the value of PDH tracker mortgages in the Irish banking system, including securitised loans serviced by these institutions, was €37.9 billion. The equivalent value of BTL/holiday home tracker mortgages was €13.8 billion. The net repayments (new drawdowns minus repayments) of on-balance sheet PDH tracker mortgages, over 2016, amounted to €1.6 billion. The equivalent net repayments of on-balance sheet BTL/holiday home tracker mortgages, over 2016, was €1.1 billion.

(Source: *Private Household Credit and Deposits* Tables A.18.1 and A18.2.)

Institutes of Technology Funding

84. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of funding proposals made by the Dundalk Institute of Technology to his Department. [22402/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including Institutes of Technology (IoTs) such as Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT). The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions

and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular are working closely with those Institutes, such as DKIT, that are experiencing financial difficulties in order to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate any deficit as quickly as possible.

The HEA has a policy framework in place for engaging with vulnerable IoTs which requires Institutes to submit a three year plan to return them to a balanced budget situation. If the Institute is unable to demonstrate how a return to a balanced budget can be achieved within this timeframe, or if actual performance deviates significantly from the plan, then the HEA will seek the appointment of an independent financial expert to work with the Governing Body and Executive Management Team to agree a revised plan and programme of remedial action.

My Department and the HEA are aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of the IoTs. The Financial Review of the Institutes, recently undertaken by the HEA in order to provide an overview of the financial health of the IoT sector, to consider capacity issues and to examine the challenges for the institutions given their respective plans for the future, makes a number of recommendations on how some of the issues which contribute to funding problems in the IoT sector can be addressed. These policy recommendations will feed into the work being undertaken on developing a sustainable funding model for the sector.

In November 2015 it emerged that the draft financial results for year-end 31 August 2015 showed an increasing deficit at DKIT. This gave rise to an urgent request by the HEA for a new 3-year financial plan designed to return DKIT to a break-even position by 31 August 2018 through a combination of income increases and cost reductions in a number of key areas including financial, staffing, research projects and maximising the effectiveness of education provision. An external Financial Advisor was appointed to oversee this process. This new plan was submitted to the HEA in January 2016 and agreed in consultation with my Department.

DKIT has exceeded its targets set in the financial plan thus far. The Institute has implemented a number of actions and efficiencies from their strategic plan and have identified new approaches to including apprenticeship provision. DKIT has also reviewed its research initiatives and have implemented a number of savings and secured a number of additional projects and funding in this area. A revision of the draft strategic plan is currently awaited following appointment of a new Acting Head of School.

The Plan is subject to ongoing monthly reviews by the Executive, the Governing Body and the HEA to monitor progress and mitigate potential issues as they arise.

Funding overall for the higher education sector is a key concern for me particularly in light of the additional pressure that will fall on the system over the next decade or so. In seeking to address the issue in the short term, I have for the first time in nine years secured as part of Budget 2017, additional funding for the sector. In 2017 additional funding of €36.5m will be made available with €160m additional over the next three years.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Oireachtas Education Committee and this consultation will form part of the process of formulating a plan for the future of the sector.

In addition, in Budget 2017 the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I, announced a policy review with the aim of designing and implementing a sustainable and pre-

dictable multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training involving increased Employer and Exchequer contributions from 2018. The review will be undertaken as part of the overall response to meeting the anticipated skills needs in the economy over the coming years, in line with the policy framework set out in the National Skills Strategy.

It will include an analysis of the business case for enhanced investment in the higher and further education and training sectors. In this context it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts including those on employers. The review will include consultation with stakeholders. The policy review will be published by the end of Q2 2017, and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

Garda Vetting Applications

85. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body to which requests for Garda vetting for transport companies that provide transport for school bus services should be sent, in view of the fact that a person cannot request clearance for themselves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22556/17]

119. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body that manages Garda vetting requests for companies that provide transport for school bus services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22644/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 119 together.

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.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the procurement of suitable contractors to provide school bus services on its behalf.

Drivers nominated to perform services for contractors operating under contract under the School Transport Scheme, and the contractors themselves, are subject to vetting procedures arranged by Bus Éireann and conducted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit.

Redundancy Payments

86. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, under EU regulations, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, EGF can be used only in circumstances in which more than 500 persons are made redundant by a single company, including its suppliers and downstream producers: the reference in the regulations to the criteria that must be met when redundancies occur to draw down funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22630/17]

87. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the eligibility criteria under EU regulation when a business fails for securing EGF funding for the self-employed who employ not more than ten persons. [22631/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 87 together.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) is an EU co-funding instrument to assist workers made redundant as a result of globalisation or due to a global financial and economic crisis.

To be eligible for assistance there must be at least 500 redundancies in a specific company (including suppliers/downstream producers) in a 4 month period, or at least 500 redundancies in a specific sector in a 9 month period. Company specific EGF applications can include self-employed persons whose activity has ceased and who employed not more than 10 workers, provided that it can be demonstrated that their activity was dependent on the specific company concerned (i.e. they were a supplier or downstream producer of the company). Sectoral EGF applications can include self-employed persons who were operating in the relevant economic sector.

In small labour markets or in exceptional circumstances, applications can be made where the minimum threshold number of redundancies is not entirely met and the Member State can substantiate that there is a serious impact on employment and the local, regional or national economy. Cases approved on exceptional circumstances grounds cannot exceed 15% of the total EGF annual budget of €150m. A number of Irish EGF applications have been approved on exceptional circumstances grounds.

Applications for EGF assistance must be made by Member States within 12 weeks of the threshold number of redundancies being met and must establish the link between the redundancies and globalisation or a global financial and economic crisis.

Youth Employment Initiative

88. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual amount allocated under the youth employment initiative each year since it commenced and to date in 2017; the amount spent in each year since it commenced and to date in 2017; the projects that have been allocated funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22632/17]

89. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the projects that have been allocated funding under the youth employment initiative; the amount per project, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22633/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

I propose to take Questions No. 88 and No. 89 together.

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee. It is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL) that was adopted by Commission Decision in February 2015. The specific YEI allocation for Ireland of €68m (for 2014-15) is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m. Seven activities were originally selected for YEI funding and the individual allocations for these activities over 2014/15 are provided in the table.

Activity	Total - Allocation 2014/15 - €m
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme	4.648
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	7.992
Tús	35.347
JobBridge	57.24
Youthreach	79.876
Momentum	13.333
Social inclusion & Community Activation Programme	6.0
TOTAL	204.436

The YEI activities are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer. The EU Regulations allow for the 2014/15 allocations to be spent and claimed before the end of 2018. This timeframe allows Member States to undertake the necessary verification work on claims in accordance with the EU Regulations. As no ESF claim has been submitted to date no expenditure declarations have been made in relation to the YEI.

The ESF Managing Authority and the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) maintain an ongoing overview of the funding allocations under the PEIL and will re-allocate the available funding as required, in accordance with the EU Regulatory provisions. The PMC has agreed in principle to the inclusion of the Community Training Centres, which are funded by the ETBs in consultation with SOLAS, as an approved activity under the YEI with effect from 1 January 2017 with an allocation to be approved following the completion of the current review of allocations.

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

As Ireland did not submit an interim YEI payment application, the €19.8m additional pre-financing received was reimbursed to the Commission. Furthermore, as there was no ESF application made in 2016, the €11.6m annual pre-financing for 2016, including €1.36m for the YEI, will be offset against the 2017 pre-financing due. The reimbursement of these amounts has not resulted in any loss of EU monies to the Exchequer.

Site Acquisitions

90. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the location of the site for the new secondary school for the Castleknock Carpenter-

stown area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22406/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the building project for the new post primary school to serve the Carpenterstown/Castleknock school planning areas is included in my Department's 6 year construction programme.

Officials in my Department are liaising with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable site for the school.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but the school patron will be informed of the proposed location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

School Admissions

91. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to ensure religious minorities are not undermined by changes to school admissions policies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22407/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware I ran a public consultation process from 24 January to 20 March 2017 on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

A number of submissions were received from Protestant and other minority faith schools. In this regard, as I have said throughout, I am mindful of the need to avoid possible pitfalls and unintended consequences such as possible impacts on these 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.

The 8 week phase of receiving written submissions formed part of a broader 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.

Public Sector Staff Sick Leave

92. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure for critical illness cover for departmental staff, including education and training boards staff; his views on the meaning of the term acute operative surgical treatment as listed as eligible for such cover; the full list of such acute operative surgical treatments accepted under such terms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22409/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The conditions that govern the operation of sick leave for Civil Servants are contained in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform circular reference number 12/2015.

In the event a member of staff is certified with a serious illness there is provision for extend-

ing the term of sick leave and this is addressed under the Critical Illness Protocol (CIP) at appendix 3 of the circular. Under the CIP, an individual may, on an exceptional basis, be granted paid sick leave extended as follows:

- A maximum of 183 days on full pay in the previous rolling one-year period.
- Followed by a maximum of 182 days on half pay in the previous rolling one-year period.
- Subject to a maximum of 365 days paid sick leave in the previous rolling four-year period.

All applications are referred to the Chief Medical Officer to determine if the request meets the medical criteria set out in the Protocol and each application is assessed on a case by case basis following consideration of the medical advice and any other relevant circumstances.

The conditions that apply to staff at ETBs are governed by Department of Education and Skills Circular 0063/2015 which sets out the arrangements for a Certified Sick Leave Scheme for all staff in Education and Training Boards, other than Teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).

Under the provisions of Circular 0063/2015 an employee who becomes incapacitated as a result of a critical illness or serious physical injury may be granted extended paid sick leave, in exceptional circumstances of:

- A maximum of 6 months (183 days) on full pay in a year
- Followed by a maximum of 6 months (182 days) on half pay
- Subject to a maximum of 12 months (365 days) paid sick leave in a rolling four year period.

The award of extended sick leave for critical illness or serious physical injury is a decision for the employer following receipt of medical advice from an Occupational Health Physician.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

93. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to amend the rules in circular 17/2015 to allow more flexibility in the teacher exchange scheme and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22455/17]

94. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers that availed of the teacher exchange scheme in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22456/17]

95. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who extended their exchange to last the extra sixth year after its introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22457/17]

96. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a voluntary transfer scheme for permanent teachers will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22458/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 to 96, inclusive, together.

The provisions of the teacher exchange scheme are set out in Circular Letter 0017/2015 the

contents of which were agreed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council. The Teachers 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 and 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.

In accordance with the Circular the minimum period for which an exchange may occur is one year and the maximum is five years.

In 2016 the issue of this time limit and the purpose of the scheme was reviewed under the auspices of Teachers Conciliation Council. Pending the outcome of the review, the maximum period for which an exchange may occur was extended to allow applicants a sixth year of exchange in the school year 2016/17. The outcome of the review was that the scheme was to remain for educational purposes with existing time limits. However, following a request from teacher representatives that a voluntary transfer scheme for Primary Teachers be considered it was decided to extend the maximum period for which an exchange may occur for one further year. Proposals, such as a voluntary transfer scheme, are normally dealt with through confidential negotiations conducted under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council.

The number of teachers who availed of the teacher exchange scheme in the school year 2016/17 is 232 of which 10 are in their sixth year of exchange.

Apprenticeship Data

97. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of motor mechanical apprenticeships being sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22459/17]

98. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of car body building apprenticeships being sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22460/17]

99. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons on waiting lists for apprenticeships in the car mechanics and maintenance area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22461/17]

100. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SOLAS has the capacity to conduct and deliver apprenticeship courses in car mechanics to meet demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22462/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 to 100, inclusive, together.

I am informed by SOLAS that there are sufficient training places available to meet current demand in both the motor mechanic and the vehicle body repair apprenticeships.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of registrations and the numbers currently on a waiting list for their off-the-job training phases on these programmes is set out in the attached table.

Apprenticeships	2016 registrations	2017 (as of April) registrations	Number of Apprentices on waiting list for phase 2	Number of Apprentices on waiting list for phases 4 & 6
Motor Mechanics	420	123	180	134
Vehicle Body Repairs	58	17	16	18

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

101. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if progress has been made to increase the number of second level places for students with special needs in south Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22463/17]

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.

My Department considers it essential that, in assessing the need for special class placements, the individual needs of children should be properly assessed to determine the appropriateness of special class provision for them.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. This can be due to significant difficulties in areas such as behaviour or sensory needs which have not been ameliorated, even with appropriate intervention, in mainstream.

Enrolment in an ASD special class should only be considered where it has been demonstrated that a student requires the support of a special class because he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

Students enrolling in ASD Special Classes must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that:

- S/he has ASD
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required. Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 50% from 548 in 2011 to 1153 across the country now, of which 889 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

With regard to Kildare in particular there are 942 students with ASD attending schools in the County. Of these, 520 students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including Resource teaching and SNA support.

322 students are attending 59 ASD special classes, including 6 Early Intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes. A further 100 students with ASD are placed in 4 special schools. The number of ASD classes has increased in the area by 24% since the 2013/14 school year.

The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish 2 new ASD classes at post-primary level in Co. Kildare for the 2017/18 school year.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

102. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason each student who requires an ASD unit in primary school is not reflected in the number of units available at second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22464/17]

103. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the recommendation from his Department for students with special needs coming out of primary school who cannot secure a suitable place in second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22465/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 103 together.

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.

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).

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. The Department of Education and Skills invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 63% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 11% to attend special schools.

My Department considers it essential that in assessing the need for special class placements the individual needs of children should be properly assessed to determine the appropriateness of special class provision for them.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. This can be due to significant difficulties in areas such as behaviour or sensory needs which have not been ameliorated, even with appropriate intervention, in mainstream.

Enrolment in an ASD special class should only be considered where it has been demonstrated that a student requires the support of a special class because he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

Students enrolling in ASD Special Classes must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that:

- S/he has ASD
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 50% from 548 in 2011 to 1153 at present. The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 181 Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year which will bring the total number of Special Classes available across the country to 1334.

This will include 143 ASD early intervention classes, 626 primary ASD classes and 281 post-primary ASD classes.

The number of Post Primary ASD special classes available for the 2017/18 school year will be more than double that available in 2013/14, increasing from 124 in 2013/14 to 281 in 2017/18. This is a natural consequence of the earlier growth in primary ASD special class numbers.

However, it should not be assumed that the same levels of growth in post primary class numbers should apply. This is because, for children with Autism, transferring from a special class in a primary school to a special class in a post primary school may not always be the optimal choice. Many children can progress to mainstream post primary with support of SNA and Resource Teaching hours, while more may transfer from primary to a special school depending on their presentation and needs.

It should also be noted that there is a proportionally larger enrolment at Primary level due to the higher number of standard years.

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

Where there is no educational placement available, my Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a student can receive 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes available.

Special Educational Needs Staff

104. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a situation at a school involving a person (details supplied) with a view to allowing the person to continue employment for an additional year; if discretionary measures can be applied to this particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22477/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In accordance with the Superannuation scheme a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) who is not “a new entrant” under the terms of the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004, must retire at the end of the school year in which he/she reaches age 65.

The abolition of the compulsory retirement age under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 applies to new entrants only. The retirement provisions, which apply to public servants (including SNAs) who are not new entrants, are not affected by the Act.

There is a provision in Circular 41/2011 which enables a retired SNA to be employed by a school post retirement: ‘Where an SNA who is retired and is in receipt of a pension returns to the position of an SNA on or after 1 January 2011, s/he will start on the first point of the post 1 January 2011 incremental salary scale’. In the event that a person who has retired on pension is subsequently re-employed, within a period of 26 weeks after retirement this subsequent employment will be in a non-pensionable capacity.

The SNA scheme provides recognised schools with additional adult support staff to cater for the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context, where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including SNA support.

Responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports and resources to be allocated to schools to support individual pupils rests with the NCSE. In making allocations to schools, the NCSE takes into account the assessed care needs of all children with identified

needs in the school. It should be noted that SNA allocations are not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school. The NCSE has published an Information booklet for parents in relation to the SNA scheme on its website: www.ncse.ie.

It is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school to allocate SNA support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised in the school. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated.

Schools Building Projects Status

105. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the status of a new school build (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22482/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for St Patrick's Special School Enniscorthy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b), which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2(b) (Detailed Design) documents are currently been finalised by the design team for submission to my Department. Once the submission is received and reviewed by my Department my officials will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project.

It is envisaged that the project will be progressed to tender stage in the coming months.

Third Level Admissions Data

106. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the number of places that exist on each doctor education course in each medical school; and the percentage of these that are reserved for non-Irish students in each case. [22512/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have outlined for the Deputy details of the enrolments on the medicine degree courses in higher education institutions for the academic year 2015/16 in the table. There is no percentage of places reserved for non-Irish students.

Academic Year	2015/2016
National University of Ireland, Galway	291
Royal College of Surgeons	494
Trinity College Dublin	181
University College Cork	135
University College Dublin	289

Graduate Entry Courses	-
Royal College of Surgeons	72

Graduate Entry Courses	-
University College Cork	71
University College Dublin	101
University of Limerick	152

Inquiry into Child Abuse

107. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the details of the bills of costs that have been submitted to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse by each of the religious congregations; the date each bill of costs was submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22513/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, established under the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act, is independent in the exercise of its functions.

I have been advised by the Commission that it is not in a position to release the information sought by the Deputy. The Commission is still pursuing legal costs and disclosure, at this point in time, of any information in relation to the amounts billed by the various religious congregations could be prejudicial to the complex negotiations currently under way in relation to outstanding third party legal costs.

In its special report No 96 titled Cost of Child Abuse Inquiry and Redress released in December 2016, the Comptroller and Auditor General reported on the global figures relating to third party legal costs. The report may be of assistance to the Deputy and can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=2503>.

Inquiry into Child Abuse

108. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 122 of 4 May 2017 when he expects the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse will be in a position to calculate the set-off that will be applied to the outstanding cash contributions owed by the religious order; the way in which he plans to deal with any set-off that is in excess of the cash contribution owed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22514/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As I explained in my reply of 4 May 2017 to the Deputy, the set-off of waived legal costs will be carried out once the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) has completed its work. My Department will make the necessary calculations at that point. As I noted in my previous reply, the Congregation that indicated it was setting-off waived legal costs against its remaining cash contribution has been advised that, in the event that the amount of the set-off is less than the €3 m now outstanding, the Government would expect it to make up the shortfall by way of a cash payment.

School Staff

109. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Longford can replace a caretaker or secretary who is retiring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22515/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy currently have the whole-time equivalent of 2 Clerical Officers and 2 Caretakers.

As the Deputy is aware, a recruitment moratorium was introduced in the Public Service in 2009. This applied to Secretary and Caretaker posts in Community and Comprehensive Schools. However, alleviation measures were put in place which permit schools to fill Clerical Officer and Caretaker vacancies provided they have less than 1 Clerical Officer or less than 1 Caretaker. In this regard my Department is not in a position to sanction the replacement of a Caretaker or Secretary that may retire in the school referred to by the Deputy.

My Department acknowledges the need to improve these alleviation measures, particularly for the larger schools. However, progress on this is dependent on the availability of additional budgetary funding and there are many competing priorities for available resources.

In the interim, if any additional secretarial or maintenance services are required they may be met from within the School Services Support Fund grant that is paid to the school. This grant will amount to €75,175 for the 2016/2017 school year for the school in question.

Schools are permitted discretion in the use of the Schools Services Support Fund in accordance with their own needs and priorities. However, the provision of secretarial and maintenance services is a particular focus of this fund which is a significant resource for schools in regard to employing additional administrative and maintenance staff.

The Schools Services Support Fund was increased by €2 to €113 per pupil in 2016 and by €3 to €116 per pupil in 2017 to enable schools implement pay increases for ancillary staff arising from the unwinding of FEMPI.

Education and Training Boards

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position regarding the fee proposal submitted by a design team (details supplied) to his Department in respect of work in connection with the development of an education campus in County Cork; if the fee proposal has been approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22529/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Part of the fee proposal to which the Deputy refers has been approved by my Department. The remainder, which is more complex, is under consideration and a decision will issue to the client for the project (the local ETB) as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the timeframe for the delivery of the planned education campus at Ballinrea, Carrigaline, County Cork; when he expects the project to go to tender, the commencement of construction and the occupancy of the three new school buildings; if the capital funding is in place for the delivery of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22530/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The delivery of the new education campus at Ballinrea, Carrigaline has been devolved to the Cork Education & Training Board (CETB).

Documentation to pre-qualify Contractors is currently being prepared by the CETB's Design Team. In addition, the Public Spending Code requires that a Cost Benefit Analysis be carried out for projects of the scale involved for the Carrigaline Campus. This work is also underway.

As soon as contractors are pre-qualified and tender documents completed, the project will then be considered for progression to tender and construction stage.

School Accommodation

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position regarding the application submitted in June 2016 by a school (details supplied) in County Cork for temporary prefabricated accommodation for the school years 2017-18 and 2018-19; when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22531/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has been informed by the school concerned that it is not now proceeding with its application for the provision of temporary accommodation. I understand further that the school has made arrangements to be accommodated in a nearby school.

School Accommodation

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the status of an application submitted by a school (details supplied) in County Cork for temporary prefabricated accommodation for the school years 2017-18 and 2018-19; when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22532/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy was recently approved additional temporary accommodation to facilitate two additional mainstream class teachers approved for the school for September 2017. The school has been advised accordingly.

It is expected that the additional temporary accommodation approved will provide for the long term projected staffing for the school.

Teacher Data

114. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of teachers employed in the voluntary secondary sector and in receipt of salary from his Department who were listed as being subject to salary deductions to facilitate membership of a union (details supplied) on 31 March 2010, 31 March 2015, 31 March 2016, 30 September 2016 and 31 March 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22533/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested is being compiled in my Department.

School Curriculum

115. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position re-

garding the second level Irish language Aonad planned for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22536/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The second level Irish language Aonad planned for the school to which the Deputy refers has been approved to commence in September 2018.

DEIS Administration

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the next round of DEIS schools will be announced; the assessment criteria which will be used; if schools that have an existing application will need to reapply; and if the existing assessment be adequate. [22545/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The new Identification Process under DEIS Plan 2017, which is applied uniformly for all schools in the country across both the Primary and post Primary sectors, assesses the socio-economic background of the pupil cohort in each school 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 Statistics (SAPs) from the National Census of Population 2011 as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index). This determines the level of concentrated disadvantage across the school system in order to identify those schools which require the greatest level of support.

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 applied uniformly to all schools in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

Schools are not required to apply for inclusion as all schools across the country are included in the assessment.

A communication is currently being prepared for issue to all schools. This will provide further information on the identification model, including details of how the datasets are used to determine a school's level of disadvantage; the importance of data quality to the process and the need for schools to provide detailed and up to date information to my Department's online pupil databases.

A key feature of the new DEIS identification process is its use of independent data which can be regularly updated to ensure a currency of the information on which resource allocation is based. Small Area Statistics, based on the 2016 National Census will be available later this year following which the HP Index will be updated. It is planned that the next update of the DEIS Identification Process will take place later this year when the updated Census and pupil data become available.

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

Work will be carried out to consider designing a more tailored system of resource allocation, within which there are more grades of disadvantage identified and resources are allocated accordingly in response to the needs of individual schools;

A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will be implemented, to improve transparency and to determine which interventions are having the greatest impact in terms of delivering better outcomes for learners;

A review will be carried out at the end of the 2017/2018 academic year to examine how the new model of allocating resources has operated;

The aim will be that, following this work, in 2018 the new model of resource allocation will be finalised, the objective of which will be to more closely match resources with identified needs in individual schools.

School Admissions

117. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department's white paper will be published. [22546/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the Deputy's question relates to School Admissions. In this regard, I can advise that the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published in July 2016. The Bill passed second stage on 17 November 2016 and will shortly progress to Committee Stage.

The Bill provides an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent. The following is an outline of some of the Bill's key provisions:

- The Bill will oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places. It is important to note that 80% of schools are not oversubscribed.

- The Bill provides for schools to explicitly state in the school's admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion while including provision for single sex schools and denominational schools to reflect, in their admission policy, the exemptions applicable to such schools under equality legislation.

- The Bill 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.

- The Bill contains a provision prohibiting the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions for an application for admission to a school or for the enrolment or continued enrolment of a student in a school.

- The Bill also provides for the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) to designate a school for a child with no school place and for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to designate a school for a child who has no school place for reasons related to the child's special educational needs.

The Deputy may be aware that I ran a public consultation process from 24 January to 20 March 2017 on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

The 8 week phase of receiving written submissions formed part of a broader 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. I will not make any decisions around next steps until such time as all of the submissions have been examined and considered.

School Admissions

118. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the implementation of the school enrolment policy will take place; and if he will take into account the submissions made by minority faith schools. [22547/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware I ran a public consultation process from 24 January to 20 March 2017 on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

A number of submissions were received from Protestant and other minority faith schools. In this regard, as I have said throughout, I am mindful of the need to avoid possible pitfalls and unintended consequences such as possible impacts on these 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.

The 8 week phase of receiving written submissions formed part of a broader 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.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 85.

Vehicle Registration

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a person (details supplied) in County Cork can register a vehicle and retain the existing vehicle registration plate. [22548/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Registration of vehicles is a matter for the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

Prior to the establishment of the central vehicle register in 1993, registration numbers were issued by the local licensing authority. My Department issued a Circular to licensing authorities in 2013, setting out procedures for record searches for vintage vehicles. Accordingly, I would advise that contact be made with Limerick City and County Council in the first instance to establish if there is a record of the vehicle. If a record of the vehicle cannot be located, the person should then contact the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in relation to registration of the vehicle.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the role his Department has in discussions within Government on the possible roll-out of a mortgage to rent scheme on a large scale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22647/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I published a Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme on 8 February 2017 representing the completion of an early action in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The review is available from the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>.

The recent amendments to the MTR scheme arising from the Review have meant that more borrowers in mortgage arrears have access to the scheme. Similarly, there have been a number of improvements to the way in which the scheme is administered which mean that it is more straightforward and should take a shorter timeframe to complete.

In parallel, the Review concluded that the current financial model of the scheme, which relies on Approved Housing Bodies purchasing from lenders properties that have been voluntarily surrendered by eligible borrowers, may not be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. One of the outcomes of the Review is that in order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency will work with a number of financial entities who have come forward with an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of pilot alternative lease arrangements.

In advance of these pilots, a targeted marketing exercise is currently underway by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), on behalf of my Department, to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangements to ascertain if they would be viable for a mortgage to rent cohort. The objective is to explore what is available within the current market and to determine if this alternative model will benefit a greater number of households.

A call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interest in pursuing the pilot arrangements will shortly be undertaken by the Housing Agency on behalf of my Department. Once concluded, the Agency will make recommendations to my Department.

In all scenarios, the focus is on meeting the long-term housing needs of the greatest number of households in unsustainable mortgage arrears.

Commercial Rates

122. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if local authorities can impose commercial rates in cases of unauthorised commercial developments; if he is considering changes to the law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22408/17]

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. My Department is informed by the Valuation Office that a development which has not been authorised from a planning perspective can be entered onto the valuation list and as such would be liable for rates.

The Commissioner for Valuation has responsibility for valuation matters, including determination under those Acts of relevant property for the purposes of rates. The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 come under the remit of the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission. Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission, subject to the restrictions specified in Article 9 of the Regulations and the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations. Any development that is carried out without planning permission or that does not comply with the terms of a planning permission is unauthorised development and may be subject to enforcement action by a planning authority.

Traveller Accommodation

123. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount allocated to each local authority in each of the years 2014 to 2016 for Traveller housing; and the amount that was recouped by each local authority. [22438/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The first three TAPs covered the periods 2000-2004, 2005-2008 and 2009-2013. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation. Local authorities submit proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department, in advance of allocations being made.

The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Funding is recouped to local authorities on eligible expenditure incurred and, where it is likely that an allocation to a local authority may be unspent or under-spent, my Department engages with local authorities to re-allocate the funding in order to try to ensure that drawdown is maximised. The allocations and recoupment in relation to local authority traveller accommodation programmes for the years 2014-2016 are set out in tabular form in the table.

County Council	Allocation 2014	Recouped 2014	Allocation 2015	Recouped 2015	Allocation 2016	Recouped 2016
Carlow	0	0	0	0	130,000	0
Cavan	0	0	0	0	8,600	9,398
Clare	181,976	250,613	37,000	0	200,000	0
Cork	0	15,322	149,000	0	30,000	0
Donegal	0	3,175	0	4,750	82,000	74,532
South Dublin	24,750	46,978	0	0	63,000	26,397

County Council	Allocation 2014	Recouped 2014	Allocation 2015	Recouped 2015	Allocation 2016	Recouped 2016
Fingal	222,575	424,754	645,000	1,113,425	26,842	0
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	8,793	23,986	0	1,592,429	419,095	129,552
Galway	0	0	0	0	117,000	123,816
Kerry	99,571	144,415	4,550	3,810	57,000	255,730
Kildare	300,000	0	200,000	0	200,000	0
Kilkenny	450,000	287,239	551,626	397,577	377,500	431,714
Laois	0	60,262	0	30,600	0	0
Leitrim	0	0	0	65,975	18,800	12,794
Limerick	0	0	*	*	*	*
Longford	0	25,000	78,000	88,966	2,900	0
Louth	0	0	0	7,620	0	444,484
Mayo	0	3,810	0	0	0	0
Meath	0	0	0	0	120,000	76,877
Monaghan	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Tipperary	353,656	*	*	*	*	*
Offaly	70,000	73,760	3,069	85,000	73,000	37,775
Roscommon	54,000	96,126	19,622	0	50,000	10,808
Sligo	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Tipperary	0*	*	*	*	*	*
Tipperary	n/a	291,874	800,000	23,142	900,000	1,399,370
Waterford	0	*	*	*	*	*
Westmeath	0	0	95,000	0	208,000	48,000
Wexford	105,901	328,733	0	30,906	96,000	87,695
Wicklow	0	67,038	63,097	27,891	46,000	0
City Council						
Cork	256,687	206,913	800,000	427,304	400,000	301,796
Dublin	407,500	481,693	366,299	99,162	1,405,198	762,342
Galway	75,127	72,241	0	62,150	40,000	0
Limerick	350,000	249,987	7,500	68,923	81,000	21,209
Waterford	0	9,769	413,347	0	263,000	13,545
Reserve	39,464		66,890		85,065	
TOTAL	3,000,000	3,163,688	4,300,000	4,129,630	5,500,000	4,267,831

*These local authorities merged in June 2014 (i.e. Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford).

Planning Issues

124. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason alleged claims of improper influence by named persons in a planning appeal are not being examined as part of an ongoing investigation regarding planning irregularities in the administration of planning in Donegal County Council. [22479/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is an ongoing independent scoping review being conducted by Senior Counsel in relation to certain allegations made regarding past planning matters in Donegal.

The terms of reference for this scoping review relate to allegations furnished by a com-

plainant to a previous Minister in respect of planning matters in Donegal. While the complainant concerned did request that a number of additional allegations raised at later points and in relation to organisations other than Donegal County Council also be included, following full consideration of that request, including legal advice, a determination was made that the review should be conducted on the basis of the original terms of reference which was focused on planning in Donegal County Council and which already involves a large volume of matters raised by the complainant. Counsel is expected to submit a report in mid-June 2017.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Data

125. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the revenue generated by Roscommon, Galway, Westmeath, Leitrim, Longford and Sligo county councils in relation to the non-principal private residence charge for each of the years 2009 to 2013 in tabular form; the overall amounts still outstanding; the compliance rates for each of the years 2009 to 2013 in each respective local authority, in tabular form; his views on whether this was a cost-effective exercise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22483/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009, as amended, provided the legislative basis for the Non-Principal Private Residence Charge. The NPPR Charge, which has since been discontinued, applied in the years 2009 to 2013 to any residential property in which the owner did not reside as their normal place of residence. The self-assessed charge was set at €200 per annum and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties. It is a matter for an owner, whether resident in Ireland or elsewhere, to determine if he or she has a liability and, if so, to declare that liability and pay the Charge and any late payment fees applicable. Under the Act, it is a function of a local authority to collect Non-Principal Private Residence Charges, and late payment fees due to it and all Charges and late payment fees imposed and payable to a local authority are under the care and management of the local authority concerned.

Proceeds from the charge are retained by local authorities and are used for the provision of local services. In the absence of a comprehensive register of properties liable to the charge, it is not possible to determine the overall amounts of the charge still outstanding.

Details of NPPR revenue to Roscommon, Galway, Westmeath, Leitrim, Longford and Sligo County Councils per liability date 2009 to 2013 are set out in the table.

-	2009 - €	2010 - €	2011 - €	2012 - €	2013 - €
Roscommon	1,561,245	1,504,905	1,414,815	1,365,910	1,236,870
Galway (City and County combined)	8,030,705	7,828,785	7,225,572	6,798,635	6,059,895
Westmeath	2,269,110	2,222,000	2,081,560	1,973,404	1,771,076
Leitrim	1,292,875	1,227,055	1,120,055	1,055,615	925,815
Longford	1,192,000	1,138,520	1,011,890	990,070	880,380
Sligo	2,397,435	2,293,165	2,145,705	2,002,805	1,759,635

Traveller Accommodation

126. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total allocation in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in the Estimates for the provision of Traveller accommodation; the amount spent each year broken down by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22495/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The first three TAPs covered the periods 2000-2004, 2005-2008 and 2009-2013. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation. Local authorities submit proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department, in advance of allocations being made.

The allocations and recouplement profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Funding is recouped to local authorities on eligible expenditure incurred and, where it is likely that an allocation to a local authority may be unspent or under-spent, my Department engages with local authorities to re-allocate the funding in order to ensure that drawdown is maximised. The allocations and recouplement in relation to local authority traveller accommodation for the years 2011 to 2016 and the overall allocation of €9m for 2017 are set out in tabular form in the following table. Allocations for individual local authorities for 2017 are currently being finalised and will be available shortly.

County Council	Allocation 2011	Re-couped 2011	Allocation 2012	Re-couped 2012	Allocation 2013	Re-couped 2013	Allocation 2014	Re-couped 2014	Allocation 2015	Re-couped 2015	Allocation 2016	Re-couped 2016	Allocation 2017
Carlow	50,000	26,146	0	305,156	0	0	0	0	0	0	130,000	0	
Cavan	10,000	6,356	0	0	0	57,412	0	0	0	0	8,600	9,398	
Clare	500,000	481,387	300,000	183,281	343,450	248,290	181,976	250,613	37,000	0	200,000	0	
Cork	425,000	10,132	300,000	171,103	110,000	148,865	0	15,322	149,000	0	30,000	0	
Donegal	25,000	61,669	300,000	233,500	88,000	0	0	3,175	0	4,750	82,000	74,532	
South Dublin	600,000	258,852	250,000	140,123	50,000	81,277	24,750	46,978	0	0	63,000	26,397	
Fingal	700,000	0	150,000	0	115,000	55,000	222,575	424,754	645,000	1,113,425	26,842	0	
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown	750,000	330,349	313,150	155,051	160,000	204,352	8,793	23,986	0	1,592,429	419,095	129,552	
Galway	100,000	292,947	500,000	0	190,000	138,840	0	0	0	0	117,000	123,816	
Kerry	400,000	600,578	23,249	17,067	0	11,025	99,571	144,415	4,550	3,810	57,000	255,730	
Kildare	200,000	0	30,000	30,000	113,000	148,352	300,000	0	200,000	0	200,000	0	
Kilkenny	450,000	501,263	60,000	640	0	94,974	450,000	287,239	551,626	397,577	377,500	431,714	
Laois	200,000	3,810	530,000	218,481	659,000	675,028	0	60,262	0	30,600	0	0	
Leitrim	80,000	14,234	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65,975	18,800	12,794	
Limerick	200,000	81,600	134,400	98,400	29,110	31,760	0	0	*	*	*	*	
Longford	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000	78,000	88,966	2,900	0	
Louth	235,000	504,109	150,000	239,508	155,000	155,000	0	0	0	7,620	0	444,484	
Mayo	30,000	38,503	136,850	3,810	0	0	0	3,810	0	0	0	0	
Meath	1,500,000	1,796,295	78,133	63,560	220,000	255,626	0	0	0	0	120,000	76,877	
Monaghan	0	197,925	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
North Tipperary	500,000	174,323	139,508	46,947	126,600	244,346	353,656	*	*	*	*	*	

Questions - Written Answers

Offaly	400,000	406,902	0	0	0	50,377	70,000	73,760	3,069	85,000	73,000	37,775	
Ros-com-mon	495,000	269,689	373,587	0	427,000	393,184	54,000	96,126	19,622	0	50,000	10,808	
Sligo	500,000	624,885	18,090	17,225	8,000	9,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	
South Tipperary	250,000	445,623	27,641	190,000	0	1,275	0*	*	*	*	*	*	
Tipperary	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	291,874	800,000	23,142	900,000	1,399,370	
Waterford	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	
Westmeath	150,000	174,718	46,452	48,655	0	0	0	0	95,000	0	208,000	48,000	
Wexford	100,000	111,422	285,000	172,552	150,000	150,000	105,901	328,733	0	30,906	96,000	87,695	
Wicklow	600,000	459,904	550,000	605,837	108,300	164,684	0	67,038	63,097	27,891	46,000	0	
City Council													
Cork	0	40,500	62,000	70,500	0	17,500	256,687	206,913	800,000	427,304	400,000	301,796	
Dublin	1,350,000	433,099	50,000	287,402	420,000	465,000	407,500	481,693	366,299	99,162	1,405,198	762,342	
Galway	550,000	135,328	360,000	391,250	159,000	0	75,127	72,241	0	62,150	40,000	0	
Limerick	1,150,000	329,341	250,000	50,106	295,000	264,310	350,000	249,987	7,500	68,923	81,000	21,209	
Waterford	500,000	503,019	252,240	259,846	25,000	76,756	0	9,769	413,347	0	263,000	13,545	
Reserve	2,000,000		329,700		48,540		39,464		66,890		85,065		
TOTAL	15,000,000	9,314,910	6,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,142,933	3,000,000	3,163,688	4,300,000	4,129,630	5,500,000	4,267,831	9,000,000

Turf Cutting

127. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the statutory instrument dealing with the large scale extraction of peat will be finalised and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22506/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently progressing draft Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 that will establish a new regulatory regime in respect of large-scale peat extraction. Under the new regime, the Environmental Protection Agency will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of licence applications for existing and new peat extraction of 30 hectares or more.

Interested parties and stakeholders were consulted on the draft Regulations in October 2016. A detailed review of the draft Regulations is ongoing in the light of the comments received, with a view to finalising the Regulations by the end of June.

Planning Issues

128. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on concerns expressed by local authorities (details supplied) that councils are at risk of being sued by persons that were turned down for planning or persons that wanted to sell sites due to the application of locals only planning permission criteria. [22509/17]

130. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether local needs criteria contained in a number of county development plans for the granting of planning permission for one-off dwellings in rural areas are compatible with Articles 43 and 56 of the EC Treaty. [22517/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 130 together.

Arising from a Judgment by the European Court of Justice on a related matter, my Department is currently engaged in consultations with planning authorities regarding potential modifications required to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in county development plans comply with Articles 43 (Freedom of Movement of People) and 56 (Freedom of Movement of Capital) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

A Working Group, comprising officials from planning authorities and my Department, has been established to review and revise the guidelines and is due to hold its first meeting this month. The concerns referred to by the Deputy will be taken into account as part of the review. On conclusion of the review, my Department will be engaging with the European Commission on proposed changes to the Guidelines, with a view to issuing updated Guidelines to planning authorities on the matter in due course. In the interim, the existing Guidelines remain in effect.

When finalised, in the second half of 2017, the revised guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Under the provisions of the Act, planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

129. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason for the extremely low allocation to Galway city local authority for the capital housing programme, which is 97% below 2009 levels. [22516/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The capital funding that my Department provides to Galway City Council and to all other local authorities for social housing, is directly related to the level of social housing delivery that each authority is undertaking in any particular year, and the associated spend. With €5.35 billion secured to support social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland, very substantial funding is available to support the housing programmes of local authorities.

I am keen, therefore, that Galway City Council advances its delivery as soon as possible. I have assured all local authorities that funding is in place to support their activity in respect of new social housing construction and acquisition.

As well as each local authority's own programme to build and acquire new social housing, they are also working with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) who can deliver new social housing through a range of funding mechanisms. I am pleased to see that Galway City Council is working productively with the AHB sector to secure new social housing in this way.

Information on all social housing construction projects being implemented by the local authorities and also by AHBs, has been published and is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Social-Housing_Construction-Status-Report_Q4-2016.pdf.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 128.

Building Regulations Compliance

131. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a new residential development has to be fully compliant with schedule 2 of

the building regulations to attain a certification of compliance and a certificate of completion; and if it is possible to be partly non-compliant, excluding those for which there is an exemption attained with some standard before a building can be legally occupied as a residential dwelling. [22519/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement in the event of breaches of the Building Control Regulations.

In response to the many building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014), which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

Article 20F of the Building Control Regulations provides that a Certificate of Compliance on Completion shall be submitted to a building control authority and be included on the register before works on a building may be opened, occupied or used. There is no such thing as a 'Completion Certificate' under the Building Control Regulations.

A Certificate of Compliance on Completion is jointly signed by the builder and the assigned certifier. This must be accompanied by plans and documentation to show how the constructed building complies with the building regulations and also the inspection plan, as implemented.

In effect, the statutory Certificate of Compliance on Completion certifies that a building is compliant with all relevant requirements of the Building Regulations.

Building Regulations

132. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the building energy regulation cert database provides an accurate data source to count the completion of new build dwellings on an annual basis, in view of the fact that all new builds require a BER since 2007. [22520/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The recording and reporting of statistics on housing activity is a complex matter that involves tracking a range of different indicators – including planning permissions, commencement notices, ESB connections and several others - from various sources, each of which measure different aspects of housing market activity. Each dataset presents part of the overall housing activity picture but none of the datasets were specifically designed to count new house construction.

Since the 1970's, the Department has published ESB data on residential properties connected to the ESB grid, as a proxy for house completions, as it represents the best available indicator, with full coverage, that a residential unit is becoming available for occupation. This dataset includes recently completed once-off homes, multi-unit scheme developments and apartments as well as some re-connections to the grid, where properties that have been unoccupied for over two years are being brought back into use.

It is important to note that the ESB figures are by no means the only dataset used to measure housing construction activity. For example, detailed information on residential construction activity is available from local authorities and the four Dublin local authorities reported 144 active construction sites, encompassing the construction of some 5,200 new dwellings, at the end of 2016. This is a very important source of information in terms of informing policies aimed at increasing supply in the key Dublin housing market.

In terms of building energy regulations, I understand that, in line with the European Union (Energy Performance of Buildings) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 243 of 2012), a BER Certificate must generally be obtained before a new dwelling may be occupied or offered for sale or letting. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), which comes within the remit of my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, is the statutory agency responsible for the day-to-day administration of the BER Scheme, while local building control authorities are responsible for enforcement of the obligation to obtain BER certificates, in line with the 2012 Regulations. My Department is examining the potential of BER records to offer housing activity data and will continue to work with all available datasets in order to gain as complete a picture as possible.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), with the support of my Department, introduced the on-line Building Control Management System (BCMS) with effect from 1 March 2014 to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990, as amended. The Department is actively engaging with the LGMA with a view to further developing the potential of the BCMS as an additional source of data in relation to house building activity.

The Central Statistics Office established an independent group in January 2017, chaired by an Assistant Director General, to examine housing statistics and my Department participates on that Group. This Group is considering the best analytical approaches to reconciling and combining datasets in this area and will have oversight of, and a direct involvement in, the examination of any output arising from the variety of analyses currently underway.

In addition, my Department has also established a new Housing Data Analytics Group, with membership from the CSO, Central Bank, local authorities and others to examine this complex area and to monitor and review the various sources of data collected nationally to provide a comprehensive and coherent suite of statistics relating to housing matters.

Electoral Reform

133. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he will take to update electoral law in view of the impact of digital spending in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22544/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): While I am aware of the current trends, both in Ireland and internationally, in the growth of expenditure on digital advertising over the other more traditional forms of media advertising, I have no proposals to amend the Electoral Acts in relation to spending limits that apply at elections at this point in time.

It can be seen from the statements of election expenses furnished to the Standards in Public Office Commission, by political parties and candidates, which are published on the Commission's website, that expenditure on digital advertising, on various social media platforms, was a

feature of the 2016 general election. I expect that such expenditure will continue to be a feature of election campaigns should current global trends continue.

The Electoral Acts, including provisions in relation to spending limits and the composition of election expenses, are subject to ongoing review in order to ensure that a robust and modern legal framework for political funding is maintained as a cornerstone in support of the operation of our democratic system. The statutory limits on election spending have been the subject of change in the past and will be kept under review in the context of future elections.

Personal Public Service Numbers

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not been granted a PPS number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22415/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application in question has been processed and a PPS Number has been assigned.

The applicant will be advised in writing in due course.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Schemes

135. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of companies that his Department has covered costs for including workers' redundancy payments and other insolvency costs when that same company has become insolvent or dissolved in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22417/17]

136. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff redundancies that have been paid by his Department in circumstances in which a company has become insolvent or dissolved in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22418/17]

137. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of companies that are operating in circumstances in which his Department had stepped in to cover costs including workers' redundancy payments and other insolvency costs in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22419/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 to 137, inclusive, together.

The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees for the loss of their jobs when the employer is unable to pay statutory redundancy due to financial difficulties or insolvency. The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme is to pay outstanding wage-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

Statistics on payments under the two schemes are recorded by individual claim not by company. The total number of redundancy and insolvency claims from 2011 to March 2017 is outlined in the following table.

When a payment is made from the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes from the Social Insurance Fund a debt is raised against the employer, which is reported in the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) financial accounts. The total employer debt to the Social Insurance Fund at 31 December, 2016 stood at €459 million.

As of 30 March, 2017 there were 13,400 employers with outstanding debt to the SIF (annual figures are not available). 3,453 of these are companies which have not filed for insolvency and appear to be continuing to trade. Three-quarters of the debt value is in respect of insolvent companies.

Redundancy Payments Schemes

Total claims received

Year	Redundancy	Insolvency
2011*	49,762	8,662
2012*	33,072	7,930
2013	8,708	8,354
2014	6,652	6,469
2015	4,266	3,318
2016	2,246	1,826
2017 1st quarter	629	285

*The figures for 2011 and 2012 include rebate claims.

Social Insurance Fund

138. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the arrangements in place between his Department and the Revenue Commissioners in respect of businesses and non-registered businesses including partnerships and sole traders with debts due to the Social Insurance Fund; the protocols in place to allow his Department contact these companies to collect this debt; the amount collected from these sources in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22435/17]

139. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of money due from companies or businesses with a debt due to the Social Insurance Fund; the whole-time-equivalent persons and their grades involved in the recovery and repayment of these debts; the amount paid out by this fund for the past three years; the repayments to this fund in the past three years; the number of persons involved in gathering statistics in relation to the debt owed to the Social Insurance Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22436/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 139 together.

When a payment is made from the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes from the Social Insurance Fund a debt is raised against the employer, which is reported in the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) financial accounts. The total employer debt to the Social Insurance Fund at 31 December, 2016 stood at €459 million. Almost two-thirds of the debt originated during the recession years of 2008 to 2013 and three-quarters of current outstanding employer debt is in respect of insolvent companies – companies who are no longer trading.

The total expenditure and recoveries for the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes

for the years 2014-2016 is outlined in the table below. Total expenditure on the schemes over the three years was €170 million. Total recoveries in the same period were €29 million.

The Department of Social Protection liaises with the Insolvency Unit of the Revenue Commissioners in respect of insolvent companies. This liaison is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between the department and the Revenue Commissioners.

The Department has a dedicated debt management unit in the redundancy and insolvency section which has responsibility for managing employer debt in line with the Department's debt management policy and for the provision of statistical information. The debt is managed through the department's Debt Recovery and Accounting System (DRAS), which issues automated reminders and annual statements on outstanding debt.

In most cases, recovery of debt is pursued with liquidators through the liquidation process. In cases where employers are not insolvent and are still trading the Department engages directly with the employers concerned. In these cases the Department is mindful that an overly aggressive process in pursuing debt with companies that are still trading, but are nevertheless in a financially precarious position, might result in those companies being pushed into an insolvency situation which could result in further job losses. Accordingly the unit engages with employers to establish the situation on a case by case basis and seeks to recover debt on a mutually agreed basis, including setting up repayment by instalment where appropriate.

The unit has a staff of six (5.1 fte) and the total cost of running the unit (including management costs) is €310,000 per annum. One of the duties of the staff in the unit is to gather and monitor data on employer debt, including data on trading status from third parties such as the Companies Registration Office.

Total Expenditure and Recoveries on the Redundancy and Insolvency Payment Schemes for 2014-2016

	2014	2015	2016*
EXPENDITURE	€m	€m	€m
Redundancy Payments Scheme	64.6	34.9	31.0
Insolvency Payments Scheme	23.6	8.2	7.3
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	88.2	43.2	38.3
RECOVERIES			
Redundancy Payments Scheme	7.9	5.5	8.2
Insolvency Payments Scheme	2.3	1.9	2.3
TOTAL RECOVERIES	11.2	7.4	10.5

*The 2016 figures are provisional pending the finalisation of the SIF Financial Statements.

Social Welfare Overpayments

140. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of full-time equivalent staff and their grades of persons involved in the collection or recovery of overpay-

ments to persons that received them from his Department; the total amount of outstanding money; the number of arrangements in place for the repayment or recovery of these amounts; the value of these arrangements; the number of persons involved in collecting statistics in relation to the debts due to his Department from the sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22437/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Overpayments of benefit or assistance arise where a person is paid in excess of their entitlement or paid where no entitlement exists. In 2016, the Department overpaid customers by €110 million. Of this, customer fraud accounted for €41 million and relates to cases where a customer intentionally provides incomplete or inaccurate information in order to receive benefits, or deliberately fails to inform the Department of relevant changes in circumstances.

Customer error accounted for €46.7 million in overpayments last year. These cases arise where a customer has provided inaccurate or incomplete information, or failed to report a relevant change in circumstances (such as an increase in means or a change in medical condition), but where clear fraudulent intent is absent. In addition, some €20 million was deemed to have been overpaid during the process of settling the affairs of persons who had died. Most of these cases relate to pensioners who were receiving a State Pension Non-contributory payment where, after death, some level of overpayment of entitlement was judged to have arisen. Overpayments arising from departmental/administrative errors were recorded at €2.3 million in 2016.

While overpayments at any level are unacceptable, they must be judged against total programme expenditure of some €19.2 billion across the 70 or so schemes that the Department administers. The outstanding debt balance due to the Department as the end of 2016 was €482.5 million in respect of approximately 191,660 individual debts. Of this figure, 42,352 were repaying their debt which is defined as having made a repayment in the previous 5 weeks.

The number of full-time equivalent staff and the grades of persons directly involved in the recovery of overpayments is set out in the table below. It is important to note that the recovery of overpayments is also a function of the Department's Intreo Service and of all centralised scheme areas. It is not possible to further distinguish the debt recovery component of the staff engaged across the Department's services.

My Department's Central Debt Unit is the area that monitors and collects statistics on overpayment and recovery policies. There are a further three dedicated Debt Recovery Units located in my Department's Offices in Letterkenny, Longford and Sligo.

TABLE – Number of Staff (FTE) on Debt Recovery Duties (May 2017)

	Central Debt Unit	Other Units	Total
Assistant Principal	1	-	1
Higher Executive Officer	1	1.5	2.5
Executive Officer	4	4.5	8.5
Clerical Officers	10	22.3	32.3
Total	16	28.3	44.3

FTE = Full-time equivalent

In late 2014, the Department introduced a new integrated overpayment recording and debt management IT system, known as DRAS. DRAS expanded on the functionality previously available to the Department and enables the operation of best practice standards in overpayment

recording and debt recovery. The improved system has provided improved control, management information and audit functionality in relation to debt transactions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Training

141. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the spend by his Department on training programmes catering for departmental staff and run by external organisations in 2016; the types of training provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22439/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department's spend on staff training programmes run by external organisations amounted to €603,908 in 2016.

Among the training included in this expenditure were leadership and management development programmes, Irish language training, policy and legislative development, information technology and systems courses, public procurement, mental health awareness, and train the trainer programmes.

In addition, the Department also operates the Refund of Fees scheme to encourage staff to pursue higher educational achievement outside of normal business hours. The scheme operates within the parameters of Department of Finance Circular 23/07. In 2016, approximately €190,000 was spent on the Refund of Fees scheme.

In addition to these external training supports, a comprehensive suite of training - the One DSP Learning and Development Programme - is delivered by Departmental training staff to colleagues in frontline roles. The Department has partnered with the National College of Ireland to place this curriculum on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Redundancy Data

142. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of debt owed to his Department for its coverage of unpaid redundancy payments and unpaid insolvency costs by companies since 2010, in tabular form; the amount of this debt that has subsequently been written off per year in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the amount of debt recouped per year in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22440/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees for the loss of their jobs when the employer is unable to pay statutory redundancy due to financial difficulties or insolvency. The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme is to pay outstanding wage-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

When a payment is made from the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes from the Social Insurance Fund a debt is raised against the employer, which may be either a company, sole trader or partnership. The total employer debt to the Social Insurance Fund at 31 December, 2016 stood at €459 million.

The Department has a dedicated debt management unit in the redundancy and insolvency section which has responsibility for managing employer debt in line with the Department's

debt management policy and for the provision of statistical information. The debt is managed through the department's Debt Recovery and Accounting System (DRAS), which issues automated reminders and annual statements on outstanding debt.

Debt recovery is an integral element of the Department's debt management policy. It seeks recovery of debt directly from employers continuing to trade and as a preferential creditor in liquidations/receiverships. In 2016 an estimated total of €10.5 million was recovered and €12.8 million was written off.

The total expenditure, recoveries and write-offs for the period 2010 to 2016 is outlined in the table below for each of the schemes.

Redundancy & Insolvency Payments Scheme

Payments, recoveries and write-offs for the following periods:

Debt and recovery in each category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
		€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Redundancy Payments Scheme							
Payments (debt incurred)	40.9	68.6	95.6	76.5	58.5	32.7	30.9
Recovery	3.2	3.7	4.09	5.2	7.9	5.5	8.3
Insolvency Payments Scheme							
Payments (debt incurred)	23.6	18.5	21.7	22.05	23.6	8.2	7.3
Recovery	0.6	.08	1.8	1.8	2.3	1.9	2.4
Write-offs in each category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
		€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Redundancy Payments Scheme							
Amount written-off**	2.4	2.8	0	10.7	35.3	9.4	8.5

Debt and recovery in each category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Insolvency Payments Scheme							
Amount written-off**	5.9	6.1	0	13.5	28.2	9.3	4.3

*2016 figures are provisional, pending finalisation of the SIF Financial Statements.

**Write-off of redundancy and insolvency debt to the SIF only takes place where the Department has completed all appropriate checks and is completely satisfied that the debt is not recoverable.

The figures for 2017 are not yet available.

Public Services Card

143. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the identification requirements for an application for a public services card. [22442/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Public Services Card (PSC) is issued on completion of a robust registration process designed to ensure a substantial level of identity assurance. The PSC is intended to replace other cards within the public sector such as the free travel pass and the social services card of this Department and to make it easier for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers in person and online.

The legislation governing the issuance of a PSC is contained in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. Included in these provisions, Section 263B states:

“(1) For the purposes of satisfying himself or herself as to the identity of a person in respect of whom a personal public service number is to be allocated and issued under section 262, or in respect of whom a public services card is to be issued under section 263, the Minister may, without prejudice to any other method of authenticating the identity of that person, request that person

(a) to attend at an office of the Minister or such other place as the Minister may designate as appropriate,

(b) to provide to the Minister, at that office or other designated place, such information and to produce any document to the Minister as the Minister may reasonably require for the purposes of authenticating the identity of that person,

(c) to allow a photograph or other record of an image of that person to be taken, at that office or other designated place, in electronic form, for the purposes of the authentication, by the Minister, at any time, of the identity of that person, and

(d) to provide, at that office or other designated place, a sample of his or her signature in electronic form for the purposes of the authentication, by the Minister, at any time, of the iden-

tity of that person.”

Full details of the PSC, the associated registration process and the documentation requirements are provided on my Department’s website at http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card_holder.aspx. The table below provides a listing of these different documentation requirements dependent on nationality.

	Identification Requirements
Irish citizens born in the Republic of Ireland	Current Irish passport or current Irish or UK driving licence or Irish learner driver permit. Adoption certificate in the case of adopted persons.
Irish citizens via naturalisation or Foreign Birth Registration	Current Irish passport or Certificate of Naturalisation or Foreign Birth Registration certificate and Irish or UK driving licence or Irish learner driver permit.
Irish citizens born in Northern Ireland and UK citizens	Current passport, or birth or adoption certificate and current driving licence
EU citizens (other than Irish and UK)	Current passport or national identity card
Non-EU citizens	Current passport or 1951 travel document

For Irish citizens born in the Republic of Ireland, birth details can be verified online in most cases with the General Register Office. However, in some cases, it is not possible to locate the birth registration, so the person may need to return with a copy of his/her birth certificate.

The Department does not have access to the adoption register, so adopted people are asked to bring their adoption certificate with them when attending their appointment.

An Irish or UK citizen who does not have a Passport or Driving licence as identification may still be issued with a PSC. When that person attends they will have an in-depth interview and additional information gathered during this interview will be verified in order to confirm their identity.

It is important to remember that a person will only be issued a Public Services Card where there is a substantial level of assurance as to his or her identity.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in awarding a disability allowance to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22445/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This person has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 25 January 2017. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 31 May 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

145. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22538/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this gentleman on the 1st December 2016. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on 21st March 2017 outlining the decision.

A request for a review of this decision was received on 10th April 2017 and additional information has been supplied. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The gentleman concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed. Such reviews can take up to 15 weeks to complete at present.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a family income supplement payment will be reinstated in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22551/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned returned to work on 15th February 2017 and notified Family Income Supplement (FIS) Section on 05th April 2017. FIS Section requested further information in relation to this customer's employment on 07th April 2017. This information was provided to FIS Section on 25th April 2017.

FIS was reinstated to the person concerned on 06th May 2017 and will be paid to their bank account on 11th May 2017 with arrears payable the following week.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

147. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in dealing with a carer's allowance application on behalf of a person (details supplied); if the social welfare inspector report has been completed; and when a decision will issue in this case. [22552/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 4 May 2017 and the first payment is due to issue to her bank account on 11 May 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 9 February to 10 May 2017 will also issue to her bank account.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 4 May 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Appeals

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal in respect of a decision to refuse payment of jobseeker's benefit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22597/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned has not submitted an appeal in relation to an application made to the Department; they have however recently submitted an application for Farm Assist. As is the normal procedure with all Farm Assist claims, it has been forwarded to a Social Welfare Inspector for investigation. Once this investigation is completed the Department will be in a position to make a decision on the claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of claims for various payments suspended and on appeal or otherwise recorded in the past 12 months; the number of appeals that have taken place; the number pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22598/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The table provides the details which have been requested by the Deputy in respect of appeals in the past twelve months in so far as they are available.

The table provides a breakdown by scheme area of the number of appeals registered and determined during the past twelve months, i.e. during the period from 1 May 2016 to 30 April 2017, along with a breakdown by scheme of the number of appeals which were outstanding at 30 April 2017.

I understand from the Chief Appeals Officer that it is not possible to provide a breakdown between the number of appeals registered with her office which relate to new claims which were disallowed as opposed to the number of appeals relating to existing claims which were in payment and which were subsequently disallowed as this information is not captured or maintained on the appeals computer system.

I am also advised that it is not possible to provide details of the number of people whose claims were in payment and were then disallowed and who did not appeal. However, I can advise the Deputy that my Department processes around 2 million new claims each year. About 85% of these are successful, i.e. the customer receives the relevant payment. By comparison, 22,461 appeals were made to the Social Welfare Appeals Office last year and 23,220 appeals were finalised.

Table: Appeals Registered and Finalised May 2016 – April 2017 and Appeals outstanding at 30 April, 2017.

Scheme	Appeals Registered	Appeals Finalised	Appeals Outstanding
Blind Pension	13	17	4

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme	Appeals Registered	Appeals Finalised	Appeals Outstanding
Back to work Family Benefit	45	51	18
Carer's Allowance	3,979	3,720	1366
Carer's Benefit	108	100	30
Child Benefit	516	545	209
Disability Allowance	4,958	4,482	1952
Illness Benefit	528	776	215
Death Benefit	1	2	0
Domiciliary Care Allowance	1,102	1,228	454
Deserted Wives Benefit	9	7	4
Farm Assist	157	186	90
Bereavement Grant	1	3	0
Family Income Supplement	535	418	285
Invalidity Pension	1,271	1,442	375
Jobseeker's Transition	47	43	19
Liabile Relatives	19	18	3
Maternity Benefit	86	90	28
State Pension Contributory	392	303	244
State Pension – Non contributory	395	392	177
Injury Benefit	56	57	24
Disablement Benefit	281	309	125
Medical Care	2	3	3
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	40	38	15
One Parent Family Payment	286	346	138
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	13	18	4
Paternity Benefit	4	1	3
Partial Capacity Benefit	36	35	24
Pre-Retirement Allowance	1	0	2
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	1,830	2,047	771
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	28	25	15
Carer's Support Grant	161	149	51

Scheme	Appeals Registered	Appeals Finalised	Appeals Outstanding
State Pension (Transition)	2	3	1
Insurability of Employment	164	172	136
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1,639	1,873	605
Treatment Benefit	3	6	0
Jobseeker's Allowance	1,870	1,954	768
Jobseeker's Benefit	570	650	225
Incapacity Supplement	6	17	4
Widows, Widowers Pension (Contributory)	43	47	20
Widows, Widowers Pension (Non-Contributory)	25	23	11
Widowed Parent Grant	5	10	1
TOTAL	21,227	21,606	8,419

Rent Supplement Scheme Review

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when rent allowance which was discontinued on foot of discontinuation of jobseeker's allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied), the basis on which cessation is vehemently denied; if steps will be taken to restore payments while the case is on appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22599/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In line with a review of entitlement to rent supplement, the person concerned was requested on 13/2/17 to provide documentation to the Department confirming her combined household income including verification of income for all residents in her rental property. This documentation is still outstanding. A further request for the relevant documentation was issued to the person concerned on 9/5/17.

On receipt of the requested documentation, the ongoing rate of rent supplement will be reviewed and a decision will issue accordingly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when rent support in line with rent increase will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied) in whose case rent was not paid since 17 February 2017 and who is now likely to become homeless as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22600/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned has been requested to provide the Department with an up-to-date lease agreement confirming her monthly rent payable. On receipt of this documentation, her rent supplement entitlement can be reassessed accordingly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Review

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) whose current payments of carer's allowance involve a deduction of €30 weekly in respect of a previous alleged overpayment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22601/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department has initiated a review of the weekly deduction in place in respect of this person's overpayment and correspondence has issued to the person concerned.

The Department has suspended the weekly deduction for 21 days, pending receipt of the requested information.

On receipt of this information, the department will determine the level of deduction to be applied in this case.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full rate of payment applicable in respect of two adults plus four children, all dependents, in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22605/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 13 May 2016. On 20 March 2017 both the passport of the person concerned and her partner's passport were returned to her in person by prior arrangement at her address.

On 28 April 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

This lady is currently in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance while awaiting a decision on her DA application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if, in pursuance of a bilateral arrangement with the UK, he will liaise with the authorities in the UK in the case of a person (details supplied) with particular reference to the person's entitlements arising from

contributions in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22607/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a widow's contributory pension at €198.50 per week, the maximum rate payable to a person under 66 years of age. She is also in receipt of a fuel allowance payment of €22.50 per week for the fuel season.

The appropriate form will be forwarded to the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK immediately requesting that any entitlement to a UK Pension be assessed for the person concerned. The Department of Work and Pensions will correspond directly with the person concerned regarding their possible entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can apply for adult dependant allowance in respect of the person's spouse. [22614/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned applied for an increase in respect of an adult dependant with effect from 8/5/17. This increase has been awarded from the date of application. Payment will be made on 18/5/17 and will include any arrears due.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current entitlement and payment of jobseeker's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied). [22616/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is currently entitled to and in receipt of the maximum personal rate of jobseeker's allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Human Rights

157. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made by the Government to protect and assist the LGBT community in Chechnya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22411/17]

158. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether steps must be taken at international level to protect the LGBT community in Chechnya and to assist those who are being forced to flee the country due to sexual orientation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22412/17]

159. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the matter of the treatment of LGBT persons in Chechnya at a European level with a view to exerting diplomatic and other pressure on the Chechen Government to immediately cease its

persecution of LGBT persons there. [22413/17]

160. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take to provide a safe path for LGBT persons in Chechnya to flee their country. [22414/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 to 160, inclusive, together.

I am aware of alarming reports by international human rights organisations and in the media of a campaign of abduction, abuse and ill-treatment of men in the Chechen Republic on the basis of their sexual orientation. If confirmed, these actions would amount to serious violations of fundamental human rights.

Last week, senior Departmental officials met the Russian Ambassador at my request to convey my grave concerns, and those of the Irish public, at these reports. During the meeting, my officials urged the Russian authorities to fully investigate these allegations, to ensure that any such persecution is ended immediately, to provide all affected persons with the assistance they require, and to ensure the safety of activists and journalists investigating the reports of abuse in Chechnya.

In a statement delivered to the Seanad on my behalf by Minister Helen McEntee on 12 April, I joined in the widespread calls for the Russian Government to urgently undertake a full and thorough investigation into these reports and to ensure that any individuals found to have committed crimes be brought to justice. I also emphasised Russia's international obligations to protect all persons who may be at risk of persecution. This call was reiterated by the Irish Ambassador to the Council of Europe at a meeting of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in Strasbourg on 19 April.

The European Union is also pressing the Russian authorities to ensure that the allegations are fully investigated and that those fleeing persecution are given full protection. The EU High Representative Federica Mogherini raised the matter during a meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on 24 April. HR Mogherini highlighted the serious concerns of the European Union and its Member States over the allegations and urged the Russian government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the rights of the gay community in Chechnya are respected, in line with Russia's international human rights commitments.

Human Rights

161. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at national and international level to address the concerns raised by Palestinian prisoners that are currently on hunger strike as of 17 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22420/17]

162. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made to ensure that Palestinians that are incarcerated in prisons in Israel are afforded their human rights and are treated in a fair and humane manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22421/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

Issues relating to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons have consistently featured over recent years in our dialogue with Israeli authorities, both here in Ireland and in Israel, as well

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as in our discussions at EU and UN level. These issues include both the numbers of Palestinian prisoners, some being held under administrative detention without trial, and the conditions in which prisoners are held.

Ireland raised particular concerns about the detention of minors in our intervention at the Universal Periodic Review of Israel at the UN Human Rights Council in 2013.

It is only fair to acknowledge that similar concerns about conditions in prisons could be expressed about many other countries in the region and elsewhere.

In relation to the current situation, I am of course deeply concerned by the hunger strike involving a large number of prisoners, now in its fourth week. We cannot support the use of hunger strikes as a means of exerting pressure. There is a real risk of attitudes hardening on either side, leading to tragedy. We do not want to say anything that could add to that risk. I am aware that previous hunger strikes have been resolved, allowing a tragic outcome to be avoided.

I do not wish to comment therefore on the specific issues which the strikers have apparently raised. However, I would reiterate our essential position – which should be an obvious one, and which applies to all prisoners – which is that detained Palestinians should have the same protections and conditions that Israel affords its own citizens.

My Department raised our concerns about the hunger strike with the Israeli Ambassador on 9 May. They have also been raised in a bilateral meeting with the Israeli mission at the EU on 10 May.

The EU missions in Palestine issued a statement on Saturday concerning the hunger strikes and issues related to conditions of detention, and calling on Israel to respect fully the rights of prisoners.

I addressed these matters at slightly more length in response to a Topical Issues debate in the house yesterday, and I would direct the Deputy also to my statement on that occasion.

Passport Services

163. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the document which will satisfy his Department regarding passport applications by stateless persons who may be entitled to citizenship but not a public services card. [22443/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, all passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008 (the Act). The Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her.

As of 29 March 2016 all first-time passport applicants aged eighteen and above who are resident in Ireland are required to present a photocopy of their individual Public Services Card (PSC) for identification purposes.

The measure has been important in enhancing protection against fraud and identity theft and in upholding the integrity of the Irish passport. It also ensures that the identity of first-time applicants for Irish passports continues to be verified to a high standard.

First-time adult passport applicants who do not currently have a PSC can obtain one through a secure process of in-person registration via their local Department of Social Protection office. Details of documents needed to complete the PSC registration process and of an online appoint-

ment booking service are available via the website *www.MyWelfare.ie*.

Passport Services

164. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to amend the current passport card system to ensure that a passport card will be valid for a full five years from the date of issue for all dates on which a valid corresponding passport book exists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22498/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The passport card, which I launched in October 2015, can be used by Irish citizens for travel within the EU/EEA and Switzerland. The card is available to all Irish citizens who are over 18 years and hold a valid Irish passport book.

The passport card is a supplement to the passport book, as such, identity and entitlement requirements are assessed on the basis of the passport book application rather than on the card application itself. For this reason, the validity of a card cannot exceed that of the passport book on which verification of entitlement and identity was last established.

All passport cards are issued with a validity of five years or until their passport book expires, whichever comes sooner. In order to alert applicants to these parameters, when a passport card is due to expire in fewer than five years, the applicant is advised of the expiry date of the new passport card by way of information notice, generated on-screen by the application system. In this way, the Passport Service ensures that all applicants are fully aware of the expiry date of their new passport card in advance of finalising their application and can choose not to proceed with the application at that stage, if they so wish.

Garda Station Refurbishment

165. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 657 of 2 May 2017, if An Garda Síochána can be contacted by his Department for an update regarding the review of the draft proposals for the recommended works at Tubbercurry Garda station to progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22426/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Office of Public Works is awaiting approval to the proposed works at Tubbercurry Garda Station, including confirmation of funding, from the Garda authorities.

Election Expenditure

166. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps the Standards in Public Office Commission will take to address digital spending in election campaigns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22543/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPOC) administer the Electoral Acts, which provide, inter alia, for the regulation of donations and expenses during Dáil, Seanad, European and Presidential elections.

The Electoral Acts provide that election expenditure relates only to expenses incurred and payments made in providing property, goods or services which are used for electoral purposes during the period commencing on the date of the dissolution of the Dáil and ending on polling day itself. Expenditure outside of this timeframe is not covered by electoral rules. Thresholds for spending in constituencies are based on the number of seats. As long as the threshold is respected, it is for candidates and their agents to determine how to spend their resources. This may include print and broadcast media, expenditure on posters, and digital campaigns among others. Reimbursement of expenses from the Exchequer is capped and only applies to specific types of expenditures.

SIPOC also oversees the Register of Third Parties, for individuals and organisations, other than political parties, that accept donations for political purposes and may engage in political campaigns. Third parties who accept a donation above a certain threshold given for political purposes must register with SIPOC and submit annual returns.

SIPOC is an independent statutory body and, as such, is not accountable to my Department in the performance of its functions. However, I am advised that, at every election, SIPOC issues guidelines to candidates, election agents and political parties regarding acceptable donations and expenditures during an election campaign and that these guidelines set out what is or is not considered acceptable.

I am also advised that SIPOC is aware that new and evolving technologies may impact election activities. While all expenditures, including expenditure on digital media, are subject to the provisions of the Acts, some digital activities related to an election may fall outside of their scope, including, for example, social media engagement by individuals.

Departmental Reports

167. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to introduce a ban on hunting and shooting between 12 a.m. and 6 a.m. from 1 September to 31 March each year; the implications this could have for farmers, particularly on commonages that use shooting and hunting as a way of controlling foxes that attack sheep; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22494/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): It is my understanding that a report has been produced by a working group set up by the Firearms Consultative Panel of the Department of Justice and Equality which recommends best practice guidelines on the issue of shooting and hunting at night. The report is now with the Firearms Consultative Panel itself and it is a matter for that body to further consider the recommendations in the report. An official of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is a member of the Firearms Consultative Panel.

I should state that I would support any best practice guidelines that promote health and safety but at the same time allows farmers/landowners protect their livelihoods.

Disabilities Assessments

168. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not received their assessment yet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22397/17]

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

169. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include narcolepsy as one of the illnesses into the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22404/17]

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

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

Registration of Marriages

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding marriage registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22416/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection. The cost of this service is met from within the HSE's budget, with some income generated through registration fees and the issuing of certificates for life events. A marriage notification fee has been in place since the enactment of the Civil Registration Act, 2004.

HSE Waiting Lists

171. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22422/17]

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.

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The National Waiting List Management Policy, “A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures”, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medical Card Applications

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22423/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

HSE Properties

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of discussions regarding a premises (details supplied) ; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22432/17]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

174. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a matter (details supplied). [22433/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

175. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22434/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Data

176. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of full and partial lower limb amputations that were carried out in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number of these persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22446/17]

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

Health Services Data

177. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated for foot ulcerations that did not require a full or partial limb amputation in each of the years 2014 to 2016, by county; the number of those persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22447/17]

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

Health Services Data

178. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 65 years of age treated for foot ulcerations that did not require a full or partial limb amputation in each of the years 2014 to 2016 by county; the number of those persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22448/17]

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

Health Services Data

179. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of full and partial

lower limb amputations that were carried out on persons under 65 years of age in each of the years 2014 to 2016 by county; the number of these persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22449/17]

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

Hospital Beds Data

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days required by persons treated for foot ulcerations that did not require a full or partial limb amputation in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number of those persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22450/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

181. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by persons treated for foot ulcerations who did not require a full or partial limb amputation in each of the years 2014 to 2016, by county; the number of those persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22451/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by persons undergoing full and partial lower limb amputations procedures on persons under 65 years of age in each of the years 2014 to 2016 by county; the number of these persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22452/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

183. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by persons under 65 years of age treated for foot ulcerations who did not require a full or partial limb amputation in each of the years 2014 to 2016, by county; the number of those persons that had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22453/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

184. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by persons undergoing full and partial limb amputation procedures in each of the years 2014 to 2016 by county in tabular form. [22454/17]

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.

Health Insurance

185. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the reimbursement for treatment abroad. [22466/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health I have no role in the commercial decisions of any of the private health insurance companies. Health insurers operate in a competitive market and are free to include certain terms and conditions in their policies, providing they are in compliance with the health insurance legislation. Benefit is then paid for claims in accordance with the terms and conditions of a customer's policy.

I understand that, in this instance, the customer in question has taken her complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman for an independent adjudication of the case, which is the appropriate office to deal with this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22468/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

187. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied). [22478/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any

individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Funding

188. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to a service (details supplied) in County Kerry in the remainder of 2017 or in 2018 to assist it meet its running costs; the funding the HSE has provided to date in 2017 to the service; the reason funding has been discontinued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22492/17]

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

Health Services Provision

189. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the ECMO facilities for the treatment of persons with respiratory illnesses that exist. [22499/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

190. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the ECMO facilities that exist for treatment of both adults and children with cardiac illnesses. [22500/17]

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.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

191. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have received respiratory ECMO treatment outside of the State in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the cost involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22501/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates a Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS), for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation 883/04, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulation 987/09, and in accordance with Department of Health Guidelines. Patients apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public healthcare outside the State through model form E112. The application requires the patient's Irish-based public referring hospital consultant, following clinical assessment, to certify, among other things, that the treatment is medically necessary and will meet the patient's needs. The treatment must not be available within the State or not available within a time normally necessary for obtaining it.

The HSE has been asked to further examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

192. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if ECMO treatment for persons with respiratory illnesses caused by complications from swine flu is sourced outside of the State; the locations that this alternative treatment is sourced; and the reason this treatment can not be provided within the State. [22502/17]

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

Hospital Equipment

193. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of ECMO machines currently available within the State; the hospitals they are based at; and the number of these operating at present. [22503/17]

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.

Hospital Equipment

194. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin has ECMO machines available which are not used to treat respiratory illnesses due to lack of funding from the HSE; the number of machines that are available in this case; and the estimated cost in having them operational. [22504/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22507/17]

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

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

Civil Marriages

196. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange a review of the adequacy of the current number of solemnisers in view of the significant increase in public demand for civil marriage ceremonies; if he will further review the restrictive timing of ceremonies at which they officiate and the fact that they only provide this service from Monday to Friday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22511/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Prescriptions Charges

197. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the total income received from prescription charges in 2016 from persons under 65 years of age and persons over 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22535/17]

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.

Hospital Services

198. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for resources to provide a 20 week anomaly scan at Mullingar regional hospital has been approved by his Department. [22549/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services and, consequently, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the newly established HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. An early priority for the Programme will be to develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans at 20 weeks. In the meantime, the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability.

One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers. In this context, it is expected that the establishment of Maternity Networks across Hospital Groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each Hospital Group can access anomaly scans. In relation to your specific query regarding the Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

National Maternity Hospital

199. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the private consultation facilities which will be provided at the new national children's hospital; the size and scope of the planned private paediatrics outpatient clinic; the number of consultants he expects to avail of these private facilities; if consultants will be charged for the use of these facilities; the amount

of revenue expected to be generated from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22550/17]

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

Garda Vetting of Personnel

200. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE requests Garda vetting for a private transport company that is contracted by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22557/17]

202. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that manages Garda vetting checks for bus transportation companies that are contracted by the HSE to provide transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22645/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 202 together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to HSE service contracts I have forwarded your questions to the HSE for direct reply.

Ambulance Service

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 369, 370 and 371 of 2 November 2016, the reason the requested information has not been provided to date. [22643/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is understood that a response to these questions issued to the Deputy on 15th November last. I have asked the HSE to re-examine their response with a view to providing any further information which might be available.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 200.

GLAS Issues

203. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an extension to the timeframe for planting hedgerows and coppicing hedgerows will be provided under the GLAS scheme in view of the fact there is a shortage of hedging plants here and farmers need more time to source them before planting. [22441/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Hedgerow planting was an available action under tranche 1 of the GLAS scheme and due to the fact that the delivery target for the entire programming period to 2020 was exceeded in the first tranche, this action was suspended for tranche 2 & 3 applications.

Farmers who selected this action in tranche 1 were required to have new hedgerows planted by 31 March 2017. No issue in relation to the supply of plants was brought to the attention of my Department before the deadline.

Harbours and Piers

204. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the dredging of Howth harbour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22469/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

Regarding a possible dredging project in Howth Fishery Harbour Centre, preparation work has been underway for some time. A report from a site investigation works, which was commissioned in 2015, was received by my Department in March 2016. The report included vital information on the nature of the material to be dredged in any future dredging project.

The information revealed from the Site Investigation Report indicated that some of the dredge material would not be suitable for conventional disposal at sea.

In June 2016, a firm of consulting engineers were engaged to prepare a report on a potential dredging project at Howth, to include the possible scope of the project, various disposal options for the dredged material at Howth and permitting requirements.

An initial draft of this report was received by my Department in February 2017 and the final report was received on 14th March last. This report is currently being reviewed by my Department's Marine Engineering Division.

Depending on the outcome of this review, and as is the case for all developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres, any decision with regard to progressing this project further will be considered under future Capital Programmes on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing priorities.

Brexit Issues

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his Department's input and priorities for the Brexit negotiations on the future of fisheries in British waters in view of the number of shared fisheries and the emergence of a fisheries lobby group in the European Parliament; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22470/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At this stage it is impossible to say with certainty what effect Brexit will have on the Irish fishing industry. We do not know yet what changes the UK may seek to the current arrangements.

In theory, the UK could indeed seek to gain larger quota shares at the expense of others. However, that could only happen if the UK were content to ignore the potential repercussions that would certainly arise from the EU side.

Any attempt by the UK to increase its current quota shares at the expense of Ireland and others must, and will be resisted strenuously.

Earlier this year, I hosted a dedicated Civic Dialogue on the potential impacts of Brexit for the seafood sector as whole. This was very well attended by stakeholders from across the industry and gave a clear insight into the real dangers that a 'hard' Brexit presents for our fishing communities. Representatives from across the seafood sector also met with An Taoiseach and

myself to discuss the potential threats arising from Brexit.

I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

I am also continuing to work closely with my European colleagues to ensure that fisheries remain a top priority in the negotiations to come.

I welcome the establishment of the European Fisheries Alliance, which includes representatives from the Irish industry, and believe that they will be a strong and constructive voice throughout the negotiations. It is clear that the alliance shares the concerns and priorities of Ireland and the other fishing Member States, namely that existing shares and access must be protected.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that, working with all stakeholders, I will be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares and any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Common Fisheries Policy Negotiations

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the upcoming renegotiation of the Common Fisheries Policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22471/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current Common Fisheries Policy came into force on the 1st of January 2014. The European Commission are obliged to report to the European Parliament and the Council on the functioning of the current Policy before 31st of December, 2022.

In the normal course of events, it would be expected that the Commission would begin the process of review by publishing a Green Paper followed by a public consultation at least 2/3 years prior to December 2022. However, that possible timetable may well be impacted by the Brexit negotiations and the process of reviewing the new CFP may not begin for some years yet.

In the immediate future, it is the Brexit negotiations that will be my absolute priority. When the review of the CFP does begin, I can assure the Deputy that Ireland will, as always, be fully engaged to ensure the best possible outcome for our fisheries sector and the coastal communities reliant upon it.

Fish Landings

207. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of fish landings at each of the fishery harbours owned by his Department for each of the past 20 years and to date in 2017, by species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22496/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested is held by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and I have referred the Deputy's request to them for attention and direct reply. It is a significant amount of information and I understand that it may take some time to compile.

Agriculture Scheme Data

208. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in each of the past five years and to date in 2017 that used donkeys as part of their stock in order to qualify for the disadvantaged area scheme or the scheme of natural constraints; the number of donkeys involved each year; his plans to change the eligibility rules for donkeys under this scheme for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22497/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme forms part of the 2014 to 2020 Rural Development Programme, and has replaced the previous Disadvantaged Areas and Less Favoured Areas Schemes. Eligibility requirements under the new ANC scheme have remained largely the same as under the previous schemes, with some minor adjustments. The requirement to maintain a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectares, calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year has been maintained. Donkeys continue to be considered for inclusion in the stocking density as per the Terms and Conditions of the scheme.

Data as requested by the deputy for previous years is below, data in respect of 2017 scheme year will not be available until year end.

Scheme Year	ANC Beneficiaries with Donkeys	Number of Donkeys
2016	836	2878
2015	854	2998
2014	750	2709
2013	716	2622
2012	589	2235

Fish Quotas

209. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the mackerel review; when the submissions received will be available to view online; his plans to meet with stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22527/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, I received a request from the Irish South and West Fish Producer Organisation to allocate the increase over 2016 of Ireland's mackerel quota for 2017 entirely to the Polyvalent Segment on a 1 year pilot basis in exchange for the recipient vessels forgoing demersal fishing in order to gauge the impact on the demersal vessels.

This matter has generated a lot of discussion in the industry and the Minister has received many representations on the matter. After having carefully considered the matter, I decided that, without prejudice, there is a case for a review of the policy on allocations between the RSW Pelagic segment and the polyvalent segment of the fleet, taking account of request by the IS&WFO. In that regard, I decided that I am restricting consideration to the increased quota for Ireland in 2017 over that in 2016.

It is important to note that I have not made any decision at this time to change the allocations between the segments in respect of this part of the quota. All relevant issues will be carefully evaluated and subject to a full consultation with stakeholders before I decide if any amendment to the policy is justified for the proper and effective management of the mackerel fishery.

The public consultation process concluded on 28 February 2017 and 353 submissions were received. All submissions are currently being evaluated.

To support transparency in this process, arrangements are presently being made to make publicly available on my Department's website all views received on the Consultation Document. Following the closure of the formal consultation process, any meeting that may be held with stakeholders will be open to all interested stakeholders who have engaged in the public consultation.

School Milk Scheme

210. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1249 on 2 May 2017, the value of products that are provided here under the EU school milk scheme for each of the past five years in respect of category 1 products that are heat treated milk with chocolate, fruit juice or flavoured (details supplied); if the value of products provided under category 1 are broken down in terms of the quantity and value provided; if not, the reason therefore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22534/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is not readily available however my Department will arrange to have the information forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Market Access

211. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that will comprise the recently announced high level market access committee within his Department; the number of civil servants that will work exclusively on this dedicated committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22558/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish food and drink exports increased by 2% in 2016 to reach €11.15 billion and Ireland exports food and drink to around 180 countries all over the world. The Department is especially committed now, against the backdrop of Brexit, to further increase market access for Irish food and drink internationally, especially for the meat and dairy sectors. Indeed this principle was already a key component of Food Wise 2025.

While we have achieved significant success in recent years in conjunction with the various stakeholders such as Bord Bia, the industry, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its Embassies abroad to increase the number of markets to which we enjoy access, there is always room for improvement.

The work required to unlock markets draws in people from many different strands of my Department including veterinary, technical and administrative. The High Level Market Access Committee will operate as a sub committee of the management board. It will be chaired by an Assistant Secretary General and will include senior veterinary, technical and administrative staff from relevant divisions to ensure that the work of the Department across different strands of market access is co-ordinated and effective. It is not intended that officials will be working exclusively on this committee.

Market Access

212. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of civil servants in his Department allocated to work exclusively on market access; the number of persons that work on market access exclusively for the sectors of beef, dairy, lamb, pig meat and poultry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22559/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish food and drink exports increased by 2% in 2016 to reach €11.15 billion and Ireland exports food and drink to around 180 countries all over the world. One of the Department's priorities now, particularly in the context of Brexit, is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally, especially for the meat and dairy sectors. Indeed this principle of market development is already a key component of Food Wise 2025. We have achieved significant successes in recent years in conjunction with the various stakeholders to increase the number of markets to which we enjoy access.

In terms of beef market access, 2016 saw some considerable successes including the extension of our beef market access to the USA to include Beef Intended for Grinding (BIFG) as well as the opening of the Canadian, New Zealand and Israeli beef markets. Significant steps were also taken in terms of beef market access to China, South Korea and Vietnam in conjunction with the Trade Mission there. 2017 has already seen the re-opening of the Egyptian market to Irish beef and beef exports have now commenced. It has also seen the extension of our beef market access to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to include a range of minced and processed beef products, as part of my Trade Mission there.

My Department is also working on expanding market access for sheepmeat, pigmeat, poultry and cooked meats across a range of markets and is also working to simplify certification procedures in a number of markets to which we already have access.

The meat market access work involves staff across the department, including veterinary services, laboratory staff, inspectorate staff, International Trade Division and a wide range of other divisions, in completing market access questionnaires, facilitating incoming inspection visits, participating in diplomatic meetings, agreeing export health certificates etc. All of this interconnected work facilitates the accessing of new markets, and on the meat side is co-ordinated by a dedicated market access unit comprising five people. The unit also works very closely with external stakeholders such as Bord Bia, the industry, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its Embassies abroad. I have committed to providing additional resources to for market access unit and am at present making the necessary arrangements.

Market Access

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the completion date for the review of export markets in which conditions of certification present barriers to trade and additional costs for exporters. [22560/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland exports food and drink to around 180 countries all over the world and Irish food and drink exports increased by 2% in 2016 to reach €11.15 billion. One of the Department's main priorities now, particularly in the context of Brexit, is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally, especially for the meat and dairy sectors. Indeed this principle of market development is already a key component of Food Wise 2025. We have achieved significant successes in recent years in conjunction with the various stakeholders to increase the

number of markets to which we enjoy access.

While a major and high profile part of the work involves getting new markets opened; maintaining access to existing markets and improving and enhancing the level of access to previously opened markets and changing the current veterinary health certificate conditions is also of paramount importance.

For example in terms of beef market access, 2016 saw the extension of our beef market access to the USA to include Beef Intended for Grinding (BIFG), exports of which have now commenced. And 2017 has seen the extension of our beef market access to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to include a range of minced and processed beef products, as part of my Trade Mission there. Some technical steps remain to be taken here before exports will commence.

However, despite the significant successes achieved to date, I reviewed the Department's approach to market access at present and one of the findings was that there should be a review of export markets which are open but where there are barriers to trade. For example in relation to beef some of these barriers or costs could include the requirements for BSE testing on cattle, only cattle aged under 30 months being accepted or conditions that the meat be boneless only. Certificates and conditions with different Third countries have evolved at different times and some of these restrictions may be related to historical issues.

This review is now complete and my Department now consulting with industry to identify priorities. I should say of course that the conditions for importing beef are a matter for the competent authorities in the importing country. I would envisage that this work will continue on an ongoing basis as needs arise.

Departmental Websites

214. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the planned portal website for exporters. [22561/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On April 24th Minister Creed announced the development by the Department of a new dedicated portal website which will bring together in the one location the full range of open markets and products, and the relevant conditions certification in a user-friendly manner for exporters.

Design work for this portal is due to be completed early next week. Development of the portal will then commence with the website due to go live as soon as possible. In the meantime a wide range of content is also being collated to populate this portal website.

Agricultural Colleges Courses

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Article 50(3) of CAP regulation 1307/2013 stipulates that educational requirements for farmers are optional for member states; if he will consider allowing persons that sit exams for educational courses that qualify young farmers for a green certificate before the end of 2017 to be eligible to apply to the 2017 national reserve and young farmers scheme before the upcoming May 2017 deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22562/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Article 50(3) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 stipulates that "Members States may define further objective and non-discriminatory eligibility criteria for young farmers applying for the payment for young

farmers as regards appropriate skills and/or training requirements”.

With regard to the National Reserve, Article 30(11) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 stipulates that “Member States may establish their own additional objective and non-discriminative eligibility criteria for this category of farmers as regards appropriate skills, experience or education”.

Since the introduction of the Single Payments Scheme in 2005 Ireland has applied a requirement that successful applicants under the National Reserve must have an appropriate agricultural educational qualification. Successful applicants are required to have completed a recognised course of education in agriculture giving rise to an award at FETAC level 6 or its equivalent. This requirement is in place to ensure that National Reserve and Young Farmer Scheme funding is targeted at bona fide young farmers. Under the 2015 National Reserve and Young Farmer Scheme Ireland introduced increased flexibility in order to maximise the number of eligible applicants into the schemes and students of agricultural education were included if otherwise eligible. Ireland was required to notify the EU Commission of the additional educational criteria being applied to the schemes in 2015 and the increased flexibility regarding educational criteria did not receive the approval of the EU Commission. Therefore, successful applicants under the 2017 National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme must have completed their agricultural educational qualification by 15th May 2017.

Where an applicant has fully completed all aspects of their course by 15th May but has not yet been verified as successful or received final certification, a Confirmation of Education Form should be submitted with the young farmer’s application. This form is available to download on the Department’s website. The form is to be filled out by a representative of the college to confirm that the applicant has fully completed all aspects of the course by the 15th May 2017.

Decisions in relation to the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme, including educational qualifications, are made in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory Committee which includes members of the main farming bodies, and agricultural education and advisory services.

GLAS Data

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that have enrolled to date in GLAS 3 by county; the number between tier 1, 2 and 3 per county; the number of persons per county that have withdrawn from the scheme after being approved, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22563/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): To date 13,689 applications for GLAS 3 out of the total of 13,964 applications submitted have been approved into the Scheme. There have been 146 withdrawals from GLAS 3 to date. There are approximately 100 applications which are awaiting a GLAS 3 final decision as the applicants also have an active GLAS 1 or 2 application and the applicants need to decide and confirm which Scheme they wish to participate in. The county breakdown requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

GLAS 3

County	No of	No of	No of	No of	No of	No of	No of	No of	No of

Questions - Written Answers

Name	Applicants	Approved	Applicants	Approved	Applicants	Approved	Applicants	Approved	Approved
		Applicants	Tier 1	Applicants	Tier 2	Applicants	Tier 3	Applicants	Applicants
				Tier 1		Tier 2		Tier 3	Withdrawn
Carlow	129	127	63	62	63	62	3	3	0
Cavan	569	565	171	171	383	381	15	13	6
Clare	844	838	431	430	312	310	101	98	9
Cork	993	972	567	557	347	344	79	71	5
Donegal	1,463	1,443	1,027	1,018	323	320	113	105	17
Dublin	21	20	12	11	8	8	1	1	0
Galway	1,670	1,634	903	893	704	692	63	49	21
Kerry	801	775	542	535	209	206	50	34	4
Kildare	131	123	46	44	72	67	13	12	3
Kilkenny	204	198	99	96	95	92	10	10	3
Laois	250	246	124	124	116	114	10	8	7
Leitrim	548	537	198	196	267	265	83	76	3
Limerick	422	415	178	177	203	201	41	37	5
Longford	342	334	59	58	278	272	5	4	2
Louth	104	103	42	41	56	56	6	6	0
Mayo	1,723	1,700	1,119	1,108	542	535	62	57	14
Meath	287	280	91	88	187	184	9	8	7
Monaghan	372	370	63	63	293	293	16	14	6
Offaly	319	314	170	169	144	142	5	3	3
Roscommon	740	721	201	195	510	501	29	25	8
Sligo	525	514	242	240	230	228	53	46	6
Tipperary	534	522	248	241	259	256	27	25	4
Waterford	130	128	70	69	52	52	8	7	3
Westmeath	301	296	72	71	214	210	15	15	5
Wexford	330	307	163	146	154	151	13	10	4
Wicklow	212	207	118	115	85	85	9	7	1
	13,964	13,689	7,019	6,918	6,106	6,027	839	744	146

GLAS Data

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications approved for GLAS 1 and 2; the number of persons that were approved into GLAS 1 and 2; the number of persons that subsequently withdrew from GLAS 1 and 2 to date in 2017; the number of GLAS 1 and 2 applications deemed ineligible to date in 2017; the number of GLAS 1 and 2 applications currently remaining to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22564/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be sent directly to the Deputy when available.

GLAS Data

218. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 that have received 85% of their total 2016 payment, by county; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive payment by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22565/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the table.

County Name	Number Sent for Payment	GLAS 1		Number Sent for Payment	GLAS 2	
		Number with PPV Pass	Unpaid		Number with PPV Pass	Unpaid
Carlow	259	1	19	119	0	9
Cavan	862	2	46	416	3	13
Clare	1,521	1	95	655	16	20
Cork	1,992	4	173	929	15	70
Donegal	1,831	6	116	943	13	55
Dublin	56	0	7	15	0	2
Galway	2,832	3	265	1,186	18	109
Kerry	1,676	4	99	817	16	44
Kildare	225	1	24	73	2	7
Kilkenny	404	1	28	189	6	17
Laois	344	1	26	181	4	12
Leitrim	960	1	63	398	6	16
Limerick	991	2	62	283	6	13
Longford	482	0	35	332	2	15
Louth	130	0	18	75	1	4
Mayo	2,345	14	207	1,175	23	135
Meath	388	1	38	178	5	21
Monaghan	542	0	36	136	2	8
Offaly	450	0	26	254	5	21
Roscommon	1,436	6	93	523	7	24
Sligo	897	1	50	349	5	15
Tipperary	1,040	4	95	466	13	34
Waterford	315	3	46	114	2	16
Westmeath	601	2	49	249	4	11
Wexford	655	8	112	240	1	29
Wicklow	293	3	36	142	3	10
	23,527	69	1,864	10,437	178	730

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

219. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the number of persons that applied for AEOS that have received their total 2016 payment, by county; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the total number of AEOS recipients that have yet to receive payment by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22566/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): AEOS II participants completed their 5-year contracts on 31 December 2016. Under the EU Regulations governing this Scheme and all other area-based payment schemes, a full check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place before payment can issue. As all AEOS II participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. All cases cleared for payment are paid on a weekly basis.

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Carlow	49	43	6
Cavan	244	208	36
Clare	556	484	72
Cork	428	366	62
Donegal	1360	1,190	170
Dublin	9	9	0
Galway	1245	1,081	164
Kerry	568	490	78
Kildare	39	32	7
Kilkenny	109	93	16
Laois	80	59	21
Leitrim	430	381	49
Limerick	224	183	41
Longford	89	74	15
Louth	41	32	9
Mayo	1399	1,262	137
Meath	83	74	9
Monaghan	151	115	36
Offaly	110	96	14
Roscommon	478	428	50
Sligo	335	298	37
Tipperary	245	189	56
Waterford	82	71	11
Westmeath	122	92	30
Wexford	84	57	27
Wicklow	80	67	13
Totals	8640	7,474	1166

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

220. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons participating in the beef data genomics scheme; the number of new

farmers that have joined since the scheme reopened; the number of persons that have withdrawn from the scheme that originally had applications approved; the number of applications deemed ineligible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22567/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is not available at present. This information will be compiled and sent separately to the Deputy as soon as it is confirmed.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

221. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 6 April 2017, the reason the full budget allocation was not used up in 2014, 2015 and 2016; the way in which the underspend accruing in each year was dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22568/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All applications for aid under both the Single Farm Payment and Basic Payment schemes are required to satisfy a number of eligibility requirements before payment can be made on foot of the application.

In each scheme year, a number of applications for payment fail to meet these requirements and the Department is therefore not in a position to make payment on these applications.

As a result, the total value of payments made in each scheme year may be lower than the total maximum value of payments allowed for in each scheme year.

The ceilings set by the Commission are the maximum payment amount allowable within the scheme for each year. Where the ceiling has not been utilised in full, these amounts remain available to the member states to pay applicants who subsequently become eligible for payment.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

222. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons and the percentage of persons that received payments per hectare under the BPS and greening scheme in 2016 according to levels (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22569/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is not yet available but is currently being compiled. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy directly as soon as it is finalised.

Brexit Issues

223. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department or Bord Bia have completed an analysis on the effects of agri trade here since the Brexit vote in June 2016; and if so, the documents and publication dates concerned. [22570/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Depart-

ment and its agencies have conducted various analyses of the likely impact of Brexit on the agri-food sector, ranging from initial and ongoing internal departmental assessments to published work by Teagasc and Bord Bia.

In the lead-up to last year's referendum my Department conducted a number of internal assessments across a range of sectors in order to establish the nature and scale of the trade with the UK and the likely implications of an exit vote. This will be an ongoing process and since the UK decision to leave the EU, includes extensive consultation with stakeholders via the Department's Stakeholder Consultative Committee and the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, in respect of which I have hosted four agri-food and fisheries sectoral dialogues.

In terms of published works, Teagasc published a study on 14 April 2016 under the title "Brexit - Potential Implications for the Irish Agri-Food Sector". The study examined four scenarios under which Irish agri-food exports to the UK declined by differing amounts, with exports diverted to other markets at varying discounts, and found that the value of exports could fall by between 1.4% and 8%.

In January of this year, Bord Bia launched its "Export Performance and Prospects 2016-2017" report, which analysed the performance of the food and drink sector during 2016 and its prospects for 2017. According to its estimates, the underlying weakness and volatility of sterling negatively affected the competitiveness of Irish exports, reducing the value of trade with the UK by a potential €570 million in 2016. However, this was offset by increased exports to other international and emerging markets such as North America, China and the rest of Asia, and overall, the value of agri food exports increased in 2016.

Brexit Issues

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the way UK imports of cheddar cheese in March 2017 totalled some 4,162 tonnes, which was 633 tonnes or 13% less in comparison with the same month in 2016; the discussions he has had with Irish companies and co-ops in this regard; his plans to safeguard producers in this sector from a ripple effect following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22571/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The trade in the cheddar cheese sector, just like with most agri-food products, is subject to numerous variables. These include production costs, tastes and preferences in export and import markets as well as any issues which effect demand and supply, including geo-political stability or exchange rate volatility.

The 4,162mt referred to in the Deputy's question appears to relate to a figure ascribed to UK imports of cheddar for March, published in the media earlier in the year. It is my understanding that the UK import statistics published were in respect of the month of January and that UK March Trade statistics are not yet published. The UK statistics for January did show that the UK imported 4,162mt of cheddar of which 3,620mt was imported from Ireland.

While any reduction in trade values is a matter of concern, it is not possible to draw clear conclusions from statistics available for a particular month. Nonetheless Irish cheddar cheese exports are dependent to a significant extent on UK markets, and my department is in touch with industry on a regular basis on these and other trade matters.

Dairy Sector

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar cheese imports from Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22572/17]

226. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar cheese exports to Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017. [22573/17]

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of liquid milk exports to Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and the corresponding data for retail sales, if available, in Northern Ireland. [22574/17]

228. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of liquid milk imports from Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and the corresponding data for retail sales, if available, here. [22575/17]

229. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient exports to Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017. [22576/17]

230. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient imports from Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017. [22577/17]

231. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient exports to the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22578/17]

232. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22579/17]

233. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar cheese exports to the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22580/17]

234. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar cheese imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22581/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 to 234, inclusive, together.

The Deputy has requested various details in respect of dairy trade between Ireland and Britain/Northern Ireland, across a range of product categories. The response is set out in the table. It is compiled based on the most recently available annual data from the CSO. For cheese, a percentage estimate is included in respect of cheddar as a proportion of the total cheese category.

DAIRY SECTOR WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM - EXPORTS - 2015 & 2016

Questions - Written Answers

				GREAT BRITAIN				NORTH-ERN IRE-LAND				TOTAL UNITED KING- DOM
YEAR		2015		2016		2015		2016		2015		2016
PROD-UCT CAT-EGORY	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes
Milk	9.8	9,950	7.5	8,132	21.9	99,251	12.6	46,211	31.8	109,201	20.1	54,343
Cream	6.8	3,533	9.9	4,770	6.6	4,112	7.4	4,580	13.5	7,645	17.2	9,350
SMP	11.1	5,484	14.0	7,993	0.6	275	1.1	612	11.7	5,759	15.1	8,606
WMP	8.0	3,376	9.1	3,778	3.1	1,507	4.6	2,302	11.2	4,883	13.7	6,080
Yoghurt	13.9	4,180	18.8	6,047	2.6	1,031	2.2	692	16.5	5,211	21.0	6,739
Buttermilk	4.6	2,596	5.6	4,945	2.8	1,369	1.7	985	7.4	3,965	7.3	5,930
Ice-Cream	8.0	3,442	7.9	3,861	1.9	1,388	2.0	1,612	9.9	4,831	9.9	5,472
Whey	35.8	13,586	20.7	13,012	1.6	1,551	0.6	835	37.4	15,136	21.3	13,847
Butter	197.5	58,696	173.6	55,507	11.7	3,860	17.9	7,225	209.2	62,555	191.5	62,732
Total Cheese	393.8	112,981	364.8	114,398	9.5	2,475	2.3	601	403.4	115,456	367.2	114,999
OF WHICH Cheddar % (est)	66%	76%	61%	72%	4%	3%	11%	8%	65%	74%	61%	72%
Infant Formula	171.9	41,441	135.0	33,626	0.2	270	0.1	144	172.2	41,711	135.1	33,770
FFMP	14.5	6,308	15.4	11,683	2.2	1,129	3.2	1,736	16.6	7,437	18.5	13,419
Caseins & Casein-ates	12.5	2,042	15.7	2,823	3.0	471	0.01	1	15.4	2,513	15.7	2,825
TOTAL DAIRY SECTOR EX-PORTS	€892	269,911	€801	272,788	€69	118,939	€56	67,640	€961	388,850	€857	340,428

DAIRY SECTOR WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM - IMPORTS - 2015 & 2016

				GREAT BRITAIN				NORTH-ERN IRE-LAND				TOTAL UNITED KING- DOM
YEAR		2015		2016		2015		2016		2015		2016
PROD-UCT CAT-EGORY	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes	€M	Tonnes
Milk	22.8	30,218	18.3	28,736	151.8	500,900	136.5	511,002	174.5	531,118	154.9	539,738
Cream	3.2	1,947	1.3	708	4.3	2,615	5.2	3,025	7.5	4,563	6.5	3,734
SMP	27.4	31,423	20.3	23,843	1.9	692	0.2	341	29.2	32,116	20.5	24,184
WMP	3.3	1,616	4.7	2,791	0.3	198	0.5	777	3.6	1,814	5.1	3,568
Yoghurt	37.8	22,683	32.0	17,254	1.1	1,691	0.9	1,134	38.9	24,373	32.9	18,388
Buttermilk	12.5	6,496	14.8	8,216	1.3	3,564	1.7	6,155	13.8	10,060	16.5	14,370
Ice-Cream	21.4	11,491	26.9	17,633	1.1	542	0.5	253	22.5	12,033	27.4	17,885
Whey	9.5	19,958	6.5	10,212	0.4	2,853	0.3	2,496	9.9	22,811	6.8	12,708
Butter	18.8	7,245	17.9	6,787	1.3	516	1.8	618	20.1	7,760	19.7	7,405
Total Cheese	114.0	27,156	99.6	26,708	0.8	178	0.6	171	114.8	27,334	100.1	26,879
OF WHICH Cheddar % (est)	32%	39%	37%	45%	20%	30%	49%	56%	32%	39%	37%	45%
Infant Formula	7.4	1,265	6.3	1,223	0.005	1	0.0	2	7.4	1,265	6.3	1,224
FFMP	11.8	2,857	10.8	2,531	0.2	80	0.3	99	12.0	2,937	11.1	2,631
Caseins & Casein-ates	0.3	142	0.3	139	-	-	0.02	3	0.3	142	0.3	142
TOTAL DAIRY SECTOR IMPORTS	€296	169,920	€266	152,209	€69	118,939	€56	67,640	€467	686,833	€415	678,600

GLAS Applications

235. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question number 304 of 13 April 2017, the official Government document or Department press release that indicated a commitment that the participation uptake target for the GLAS scheme in the RDP 2014 to 2020 was 50,000 farmers by 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22582/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 -2020 approved by EU Commission set out the target date of end of 2018 for the achievement of full participation levels of 50,000 in the scheme. This participation level has been achieved.

Beef Exports

236. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeline for finalising a veterinary health certificate with AQSIQ to allow beef access to China; the expected date for an inspection visit by the Chinese certification and accreditation administration to approve individual processing plants for export; if this will take place in 2017 or 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22583/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I was very pleased to welcome Minister Zhi of AQSIQ to Ireland last month as a follow-up to our negotiations in Beijing last September. China is now such an important partner of Ireland on agri-food issues and they are our third largest trading partner in this sector. Irish Agri-food exports to China have increased from approximately €240 million in 2012 to €780 million in 2016, a three-fold increase.

Signing the Beef Protocol on the export of beef from Ireland to China with Minister Zhi marked another major milestone in the process of getting Irish beef exported to China. It is the culmination of five years of intensive political, technical and diplomatic engagement with the Chinese authorities. The Protocol sets out the obligations of the Department in trading beef with China.

In order to complete the process to allow Irish beef exporters access to the Chinese market a veterinary health certificate with AQSIQ must be finalised. This is the document which would accompany the actual consignment of beef. Some of the criteria that will need to be in the certificate are already set out in the Protocol.

This will be followed by an inspection visit by the Chinese Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA) to approve individual processing plants for export.

The conclusion of this process is regarded by my Department as a matter of the highest priority and is currently being progressed in conjunction with the Irish Embassy in Beijing. Ultimately, however, the timeline for the finalisation of these arrangements is a matter for the Chinese Authorities.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

237. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the ceiling per person in place for annual basic scheme payments under pillar 1 in CAP

2014 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22584/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The maximum payment that can be granted to any one farmer under the Basic Payment Scheme (excluding the Greening Payment) in Ireland in any one scheme year is capped at €150,000. The EU regulations allow for a sliding scale of reductions above this €150,000 threshold, and Ireland implemented a 100% reduction thus setting the cap at the lowest level allowable.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

238. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the ceiling per person in place for the greening portion of payments under basic scheme payments of pillar 1 in CAP 2014 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22585/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All eligible farmers will receive a payment under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and a Greening Payment. The Greening payment is a top-up of the BPS and amounts to approximately 44% of the total value of entitlements activated. Over 90% of farmers will automatically qualify for the Greening Payment on the basis of their current farming practices. The remainder will have to undertake specific measures to qualify as outlined in the 2017 BPS Terms and Conditions Booklet.

Brexit Issues

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of each EU Agriculture Council Ministers' meeting at which he made the case for the need for a revision of EU Regulation No. 1407/2013 to protect agri enterprises and related jobs during the UK's two-year exit from the EU; the date of every such meeting at which this was raised, in tabular form; the status of progress being made at EU level to increase current state aid thresholds to support agri enterprises in the event of a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22586/17]

240. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of each EU Agriculture Council Ministers' meeting at which he made the case for a revision of state aid de minimis rules up to a maximum amount of at least €30,000 per farm (details supplied); the date of every such meeting at which this was raised, in tabular form; the status of progress being made at EU level to increase current state aid thresholds to support farm enterprises in the event of a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22587/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 240 together.

I raised the question of revising State Aid rules to increase the agriculture de minimis limits in 2016 during discussions at the Council of Agriculture Ministers, as a potential measure that could be introduced to assist primary producers in the wake of the market difficulties they had been experiencing in the previous 12-18 month period.

I have also discussed this question informally with Commissioner Hogan.

Having said that, I and my officials are continuing our engagement with the Commission

and with other Member States to ensure that Ireland's concerns and requirements in relation to Brexit are fully understood.

As the deputy is already aware, a number of measures were introduced to support the agri-food sector in dealing with the fall in value of sterling against the euro. These support measures include additional funding for Bord Bia and Bord Iascaigh Mhara, increased expenditure on the Rural Development Programme and the Seafood Development Programme and enhanced agri-taxation measures. From a state aid perspective, the recently launched €150 million low-cost loan scheme, includes de minimis aid to permit the funding to be used for non livestock farmers, in particular tillage and horticulture farmers.

As regards a revision of EU Regulation 1407/2013, or the general de minimis regulation, this is something that falls within the remit of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (D/JEI).

European Fund for Strategic Investments

241. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has applied for funding from the European Fund for Strategic Investments, EFSI, for projects to support SMEs; the projects that were approved for funding; the amount of funding allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22588/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2014, my Department contributed projects for inclusion in Ireland's project list as submitted to the "EIB-Commission-Member State Special Task Force on developing an investment project pipeline in the EU". The possible projects and project areas that were outlined at that time included:

- An Agri-Food Loan Fund
- Afforestation and the creation of woodland
- Capital projects in Fishery Harbours
- Marine Research and Infrastructure Initiative, the Irish Digital Ocean.

This was in advance of the launch of the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), which is now available to provide loans and guarantees for strategic investments, and is managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The recent Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme was developed by my Department in cooperation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). My Department contributed €25million, including €11.1 million from the EU's 'exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers' and some €14 million in national funding. This allowed the Scheme to leverage €150 million in total funding for farmers. SBCI did not providing funding, but along with COSME (the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs) and EFSI, is providing the guarantee required to underpin the loan's flexibility, and lower the cost of the loans.

My Department will continue to engage with the European Investment Bank in relation to funding options for the agri-food sector.

EU Funding

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 675 of 11 April 2017, if the moneys under assigned revenue for conformity clearance and European Agriculture Guarantee Fund irregularities were returned to the Exchequer or the EU budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22589/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Amounts reported as Assigned Revenue arise from a number of different sources. Recoveries from Irregularities and Superlevy (until 2016) come directly from beneficiaries and are transferred to the EU. Conformity Clearance amounts are charged to the Exchequer and paid over to the EU via the prescribed budget lines.

Agriculture Scheme Expenditure

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the annual budget allocated to voluntary coupled payments under pillar 1 of CAP 2014 to 2020, in tabular form. [22590/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As provided for in Article 49 of EU Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 member states are allowed to use part of their national ceilings for direct payments for coupled support in certain sectors or regions in clearly defined cases. The annual budget for Ireland for Voluntary Coupled Payments under Pillar 1 of CAP 2015 - 2019 is €3million per year.

Waste Management

244. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 229 of 21 June 2016, the details of the proposed free allowance for adult incontinence wear in view of the imminent introduction of pay-by-weight charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22518/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

My Department is currently reviewing, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives, the introduction of an incentivised system which encourages people to prevent, reduce and segregate their waste. This approach is in line with Government waste policy to reduce our reliance on landfill for waste disposal and will also facilitate the provision of a range of options for people to manage their waste costs. The issue raised by the Deputy will be considered as part of the review.

I have already indicated quite clearly that any such system will encompass more than just the previously proposed pay-by-weight per-kilogramme model. It is important to acknowledge that many people are already on plans which encourage waste prevention and segregation, including models which contain an element of weight-based charging.

Inland Fisheries

245. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the documents his Department requires from a person (details supplied) in County Kerry to claim an asserted right to fishing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22491/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the state agency responsible for the protection, management and conservation of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources. I have been informed by IFI that where an individual is claiming a right to angling the onus is on the individual to prove their title either through the production of appropriate title documentation available from the Property Registration Authority of Ireland or the right would need to be proven to the satisfaction of the courts.

Driver Licences

246. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the procedure for persons in Northern Ireland who wish to exchange their British driver licences for licences from this State. [22431/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under EU legislation, Member States issue driving licences to persons whose normal residence is within their jurisdiction. If a person is normally resident in Northern Ireland, we are therefore not able to issue them with an Irish driving licence. If a person from Northern Ireland moves to this jurisdiction, they may exchange their driving licence for the Irish equivalent.

Rail Network Expansion

247. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the National Transport Authority's work on the redesign of the DART interconnector in collaboration with Irish Rail; if the study to re-examine tunnel size options is complete; if this work will be finalised in time for the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22484/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have been advised by the National Transport Authority (NTA) that the tunnel configuration study, which identified tunnel type options that may be used in further development of the DART Underground Tunnel project, has been completed. Separately, other work is ongoing to examine and assess other aspects of the project.

As I have previously outlined to the Deputy, funding has been provided under the Capital Plan for work on the redesign of the tunnel and other elements of the overall DART Expansion Programme.

Sports Capital Programme

248. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which he will commence awarding the next round of capital grants for sports and recreation clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22485/17]

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

O'Donovan): All of the 2320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Tourism Project Funding

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for a festival in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22510/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in festivals through the National and Regional Festivals and Participative Events Programmes, it has no role in the administration of those funding programmes. Similarly, my Department has no discretionary funds at its disposal to invest in festivals or in any other tourism proposals.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply, which I hope will address your concerns. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Vehicle Testing

250. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a deferral of the introduction of NCTs for tractors will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22528/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Directive 2014/45/EU on the periodic roadworthiness testing of motor vehicles and their trailers, requires Member States, from May 2018, to introduce compulsory testing for tractors with a maximum design speed exceeding 40 km/h which are being used for commercial road haulage purposes. There are no opt outs or derogations from the terms of this Directive.

My Department is currently working with the Road Safety Authority in relation to the implementation of the aforementioned mandatory requirement in line with the May 2018 deadline. It is anticipated that the Authority will be engaging with key stakeholder groups and issuing guidance in relation to the implementation of this Directive as soon as practically possible.

Sports Capital Programme

251. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for the current round of sports capital funding; and when those that apply may expect to be informed of the results. [22555/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): All of the 2320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme

will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Legislative Programme

252. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to publish the heads of the Bill to address problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22634/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): On 2 May last, the Government approved draft legislative proposals as a response to the Programme for Government commitment to address the problems caused by the increased casualization of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. The draft legislation was referred to the Office of the Attorney General on 4 May for priority drafting of a Bill.

The proposals aim to address a number of key issues which have been identified as being areas where current employment rights legislation can be strengthened to the benefit of employees, particularly low-paid and more vulnerable employees, without imposing unnecessarily onerous burdens on employers and businesses.

The proposals are the result of extensive consultations, including the public consultation of the University of Limerick study on Zero Hour Contracts and low hour contracts as well as a detailed dialogue process with ICTU and Ibec over a period of several months.

The proposals address the following key issues:

- Ensuring that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and in particular their core terms at an early stage of their employment.
- Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable workers who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.
- Prohibiting zero hours contracts, except in cases of genuine casual work or emergency cover or short-term relief work for that employer.
- Ensuring that workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week than provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.
- Strengthen the anti-victimisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under these proposals.

I am referring the draft legislation to the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation for the Committee to consider and determine if it wishes to engage in pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposed Bill.

Economic Competitiveness

253. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the de-

tails of the international competitiveness ranking metric which Enterprise 2025 is referring to in the target set for gaining a top three ranking among the most competitive small countries in the world; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22635/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Enterprise 2025 sets out a total of 30 metrics against which success of our policies can be measured over time. In terms of overarching national outcomes one of the metrics relates to Ireland's competitiveness.

The metric used is sourced from the World Bank Doing Business. Economies are ranked on their ease of doing business, from 1–190. A high ease of doing business ranking means the regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and operation of a local firm. The rankings cover ten topics, each consisting of several indicators, giving equal weight to each topic.

At the time of developing Enterprise 2025, Ireland ranked 13th overall and 7th when compared with small economies. Based on the most recent World Bank data, Ireland's ranking has dropped to 9th when compared with small economies.

However, as measured by the IMD's World Competitiveness Yearbook, Ireland's relative competitiveness has improved since 2011 - moving from 16th to 7th in 2016. According to the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report, Ireland's ranking has moved up from 25th to 24th position.

Ireland's relative competitiveness and ease of doing business is crucially important as we face a considerably changed global landscape.

In this context I have asked my officials to undertake a progress review of Enterprise 2025 and of our performance overall against the range of metrics used. We need to determine the extent to which the policy framework and priorities set out in Enterprise 2025 are robust in light of potentially disruptive global change and domestic enterprise growth dynamics and changes necessary. In addition, the work of the National Competitiveness Council is of considerable value in highlighting specific challenges in terms of relative competitiveness that will inform our policy responses

Exports Data

254. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the percentages of tradeable exports made by foreign and indigenous firms in the year from when the most current data is available. [22636/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): For Ireland as a small open economy, sustainable long term growth is dependent on continued success in international markets. Although the global economy has been in a low growth phase over the last five years, Ireland's internationally traded sector has driven solid economic growth, demonstrating its ability to rebound following a deep recessionary period. Our export led strategy is delivering jobs throughout the economy – there have been almost 209,000 jobs created since 2012 and the unemployment rate is now down to 6.2%.

In terms of agency supported enterprises, total exports for 2015 (latest data available) amounted to €171 billion. Of that, exports of Irish-owned agency assisted firms were €18.7bn, equating to almost 11% of total exports by agency supported enterprises, as illustrated in the following table.

In terms of Direct Economic Expenditures (materials and services sourced in Ireland and payroll), Irish-owned firms account for just over half of the total expenditure in the Irish economy by agency supported firms in 2015, as set out in the following tables.

Exports - agency supported enterprises

	2013	2014	2015
	€'000	€'000	€'000
Foreign Owned	126,696	134,963	152,577
Irish Owned	14,909	16,569	18,731
Total	141,605	151,532	171,308
Irish owned as % of total	10.53%	10.93%	10.93%

Direct Economy Expenditures

Farms			
Foreign Owned	19,061	20,471	20,818
Irish Owned	18,844	20,605	21,793
Total	37,905	41,076	42,611
Irish owned as % of total	49.71%	50.16%	51.14%

Exports Data

255. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the analysis in the recent report (details supplied) regarding the percentages of tradeable exports made by foreign and indigenous owned firms. [22637/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The evidence provided by the report, Expanding and diversifying the manufactured exports of Irish-owned enterprises April 4, 2017, undertaken by the ESRI on behalf of my Department and Enterprise Ireland, highlights the balance of exports between multinational corporations and indigenous enterprises. This research on manufacturing exports examines how firms launch, adapt, diversify and grow their exports and provides insights into the opportunities, risks and challenges of operating in the global marketplace.

It shows that exporting is highly concentrated in a relatively small percentage of firms and most exporters sell a small number of products to few markets. 11% of highly globalised Irish-owned firms (exporting more than 20 products to over 20 destinations) account for 46% of total exports. Exporting firms continually adjust product and market mixes. In the context of indigenous manufacturing companies it outlines the risks and challenges faced by businesses across many sectors in gaining traction with new products in existing markets and new products in new markets.

Export growth is largely driven by product and market changes. While in the short and medium run export volumes may be largely explained by the sales of existing products to their current markets, in the long run, the drivers of export growth are expansion of markets and products.

The findings in this report formed an input into the development of Enterprise Ireland's

Strategy 2017-2020 – Build Scale, Expand Reach, Deliver Global Ambition, which is designed to support companies to further growth in existing markets and to develop new products and services to gain entry to new markets.

Following the UK withdrawal from the EU and given the level of Enterprise Ireland's clients' exports to the UK (37% in 2015), I have secured additional Capital and current funding for Enterprise Ireland in 2017, to further assist it in supporting clients, protecting Irish jobs and exports.

39 extra staff are being provided for Enterprise Ireland's overseas offices and in the Irish based team. These will be assigned to markets that are growing and have scale (including China, India, Latin America, Africa) and markets where we are already well established but with potential for further growth (including UK, France, Benelux, Germany, USA, the Nordics).

Driving new growth and supporting companies exposed to Brexit is a priority for my Department.

Brexit Issues

256. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the warnings made in the National Competitiveness Council's latest report, Benchmarking Competitiveness: Ireland and the UK, 2017, with respect to Brexit posing a serious and imminent threat to the State's economic prosperity (details supplied). [22638/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The latest report by the National Competitiveness Council highlights how the challenges posed by Brexit provide urgent impetus to pursue policies that enhance our competitiveness performance. The Council's report provides a timely reminder of Ireland's strengths, which need to be protected and enhanced, and also of areas where we need to remain vigilant and accelerate progress on addressing competitiveness gaps with the UK so as to ensure job creation across all regions.

My Department and the Government are very conscious of the need for a sustained focus on competitiveness. The 2017 Action Plan for Job sets out an ambitious target for Ireland to achieve a top 5 global competitiveness ranking based on the IMD Competitiveness Scorecard by 2020. Through the reforms set out in the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs, my Department and others are working to improve the ease of doing business, reduce the administrative burden by putting transactions on-line, enhance our cost competitiveness such as addressing insurance costs, increase innovation capacity and productivity and drive greater efficiencies across the enterprise base.

My Department is also increasing resources for Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to increase the competitiveness of our indigenous enterprise base and enhance our attractiveness as a location for FDI relative to the UK. We have increased resources for the enterprise development agencies. Enterprise Ireland has published its new strategy for the period to 2020 while IDA Ireland is undertaking a progress review of its five year strategy. We are undertaking a review of our own Government enterprise policy Enterprise 2025. We are examining the sector-by-sector implications of the UK leaving the Single Market. Work is underway on possible future supports for SMEs that could be impacted by Brexit. As a follow-on to the Government's new Trade and Investment Strategy, Ireland Connected, launched in March, Enterprise Ireland will shortly publish its Eurozone Strategy.

The challenges posed by Brexit provide urgent impetus to pursue policies that enhance our

competitiveness performance. We have already begun steps to address this, prioritising investment to improve the availability and quality of infrastructure as part of the Review of the Capital Plan and the forthcoming National Planning Framework, within the context of ensuring the sustainability of our public finances.

We have placed a central focus on further developing our skilled labour force so as to retain and win mobile investment and support the growth of a cohort of internationally-trading indigenous companies. We are continuing to invest in skills development under the National Skills Strategy.

Through a range of measures, including MicroFinance Ireland and the Credit Guarantee Scheme developed by my Department, we are enhancing access to competitively priced sources of finance for growth to facilitate businesses to establish and grow. We are also increasing public investment in R&D to enhance Ireland's innovation performance.

The Government will continue to implement improvements to policies that were identified as priority areas in the report. Competitiveness is key to success in international markets and helping businesses to improve their competitiveness will remain a key focus for my Department and Government.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

257. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has applied for funding projects under the European Fund for Strategic Investments for support for SMEs or commercial enterprises; the projects that were approved for funding; the total funding allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22639/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is an initiative launched jointly by the EIB Group (European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) and the European Commission to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments. EFSI is one of the three pillars of the Investment Plan for Europe that aims to revive investment in strategic projects around Europe to ensure that money reaches the real economy. EFSI has been integrated into the EIB Group and projects supported by EFSI are subject to the normal EIB project cycle and governance.

My Department has no direct role in securing funding from EFSI on behalf of SMEs or commercial enterprises.

EFSI has two specific windows: the SME Window and the Infrastructure & Innovation Window. The latter is managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) whilst the former is managed by the European Investment Fund (EIF), through financial intermediaries. Each Window has a ring-fenced budget.

Under the SME Window, SMEs and mid-caps seeking loans and equity capital under EFSI must contact EIF-approved financial intermediaries directly.

Such financial intermediaries are Financial, Credit & Guarantee Institutions, and Loan Funds established and operating in one or more of the EU Member States duly authorised to carry out lending/leasing activities to SMEs and Small Mid-Caps, as well as Fund management companies targeting SMEs and Small Mid-Caps. They apply to the EIF to become approved financial intermediaries and to secure EFSI financing, deployed through EIF.

Under the Infrastructure and Innovation Window, large corporates, special purpose vehicles or Midcap companies (with up to 3,000 employees) can apply directly to the EIB for project loans or loans to finance research and innovation. These loans have a minimum size of €25 million. Such projects undergo the standard EIB due diligence process, in order to verify their eligibility for EIB financing and for EFSI backing.

IDA Site Visits

258. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland client visits to each county in 2017 on a monthly basis, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22640/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland maintains statistics of site visits by potential investors on a quarterly basis only. In the first quarter of 2017, there were 173 site visits, up from 136 for the same period in 2016. The table sets out, on a county-by-county basis, the number of IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits for the first quarter of 2017.

Site Visits by County, 2016 and Quarter 1 2017

County	2016	Q1 2017
Carlow	9	3
Cavan	2	0
Clare	18	10
Cork	49	9
Donegal	7	1
Dublin	284	82
Galway	42	23
Kerry	3	1
Kildare	8	2
Kilkenny	10	2
Laois	6	0
Leitrim	8	1
Limerick	49	10
Longford	6	0
Louth	24	5
Mayo	5	0
Meath	8	0
Monaghan	2	1
Offaly	4	1
Roscommon	1	1
Sligo	20	2
Tipperary	8	5
Waterford	17	3
Westmeath	36	9
Wexford	7	1
Wicklow	5	1

County	2016	Q1 2017
Total	638	173

Brexit Issues

259. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of each European Union, EU Competitiveness Council Ministers' meeting at which she made the case for the need for a revision of State aid rules of Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 to protect enterprises and jobs here during the UK's two-year exit phase from the EU; the date of every such meeting at which this was raised, in tabular form; the status of progress being made at EU level to increase current State aid thresholds to support enterprises in the event of a hard Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22642/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

Since the Brexit Referendum, I have attended two meetings of the Competitiveness Council. State Aid rules did not feature on the agenda. However, in my engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings. Last autumn, officials of my Department initiated discussions with DG Competition to sensitise the Commission to potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result. These discussions continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work with industry.

Central Bank of Ireland

260. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has satisfied herself with the role of the Central Bank in facilitating job creation opportunities in view of financial services firms wishing to relocate here after Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22649/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Central Bank delivers effective regulation and supervision in achieving its mandate of safeguarding financial stability and protecting consumers. It carries out its functions in the context of a harmonised approach to financial regulation across the European Union.

A key element in sustaining Ireland's attractiveness to financial services providers is the Central Bank's international credibility and reputation as a strong and independent regulator. The Bank does not, however, have a promotional mandate and is precluded from actively promoting Ireland as a location for international financial services activities. This responsibility

ity lies instead with IDA Ireland, who continue to work assiduously to attract further financial services-related foreign direct investment to Ireland, whether Brexit-related or not.

Child Care Costs

261. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has conducted an economic analysis on the potential impact of the single affordable child care scheme on child care prices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22427/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The policy paper on the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS), which the Government approved last October included a preliminary economic analysis of childcare provision in Ireland. The policy paper examined the option of imposing price-caps on childcare providers to prevent erosion of subsidies through fee-inflation. The policy paper noted the potential benefits of price-caps, including preventing fee-inflation and providing certainty for parents, and equity between parents. It did however note the problems that might arise. Introduction of price-caps would represent economic regulation of the market, raising legal questions as well as economic questions as to what constitutes a fair price for childcare.

The policy paper recommended that there should be no initial price-cap, but that the option of price-caps should be considered following the Independent Review of Costs and examination of the initial market response to higher subsidies. The Independent Review, which will be commissioned later this year, will include examination of variation in costs and fees. It will be a key input into any future consideration of the potential benefits and risks of introducing price-caps.

Child Care Costs

262. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to ensure the financial viability and affordability of the child care sector in addition to the single affordable child care scheme. [22428/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme will replace all the existing targeted childcare schemes. When it is introduced, two schemes will then be in operation to support the affordability of childcare and early education: the Affordable Childcare Scheme, and the ECCE free pre-school programme, which will continue to provide 15 hours of free early education each week during term-times for children from the age of 3 until they start primary school.

The Independent Review of the Cost of Quality Childcare, which will be commissioned later this year, will include consideration of factors that impact on the financial viability of the childcare sector. While the precise scope and methodology of the Independent Review is still to be confirmed, the Review is likely to examine issues such as:

- the total average cost of provision;
- costs and revenues for services operating in disadvantaged communities, including the range of service provided by such services and sustainability issues and
- the likely impact of future cost-pressures. This will inform future policy development and Estimate processes.

In the longer term, the question of sustainability must be addressed comprehensively, and at the core of this is working with community services to develop adequate funding streams and business models. The Deputy will be aware that I have recently announced a significant expansion and extension of the funding available under the Community Childcare Subvention from September of this year; which I anticipate will be of significant assistance to services. In addition arrangements are progressing for the provision of ‘non-contact time’ funding to services this summer, representing an additional seven days’ payment to each service, for which I secured €14.5m in Budget 2017. I will be seeking to retain this funding in 2018 and am examining integrating this into the capitation rates paid to services. I will also be examining how the €1m sustainability funding provided for 2017 can be used in 2018, and I will be working with the sector and stakeholders in this endeavour.

Child Care Services Data

263. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons that will be availing of the targeted level of subsidy under the single affordable child care scheme; and the number of persons that will avail of the universal level of subsidy. [22429/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It is estimated that in the first year of operation of the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme the total number of children availing of subsidies under the scheme will be up to 79,000, of which up to 54,000 will benefit from targeted subsidies and approximately 25,000 will benefit from the universal level of subsidy under the scheme. As many families have more than one child in childcare, the number of families benefiting from the scheme is expected to be less.

It is expected that over time the number of beneficiaries is likely to rise further, as the labour market response and changes in parental choices in response to the rise in childcare subsidies will take time to have their full effect.

It must be stressed that these figures are estimates. The take-up of childcare subsidies depends not just on eligibility, but on parental demand for childcare, and on the availability of childcare places in local childcare facilities that are taking part in the scheme.

As the policy paper on the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme makes clear (p.66) “We do not know how great the increase in demand will be, and the research evidence does not offer a clear guide. International research in relation to the impact of childcare reforms on the demand for childcare indicates considerable variation between countries, which reflects variation in labour market conditions, in the degree of targeting of reforms and in parental preferences between different types of childcare, and there is no Irish research on the question.”

Child Care Services Regulation

264. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she has taken to ensure that a larger number of child minders will be eligible providers under the single affordable child care scheme. [22430/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme has been designed to facilitate the inclusion of childminders. However, it is essential that public subsidies are only provided to childcare providers where there is a sufficient level of assurance of the quality of provision. For this reason, the Affordable Childcare

Scheme will be delivered through Tusla-registered childcare providers, both centre-based providers and childminders.

A working group has been established, chaired by Childminding Ireland (CMI), and including officials from Tusla and the Department, to make recommendations on reforms for the sector including proposals in relation to quality assurance, whether on a voluntary/non-statutory basis in the short term, or on a mandatory/statutory basis in the long term. These will include recommendations in relation to childminders who are exempt from registration with Tusla (Child and Family Agency) (those minding three or fewer pre-school children, or those minding school age children only). The recommendations are likely to include proposals to be progressed in the short, medium and long term, including the development of National Quality Standards for childminders and a proportionate system of quality assurance and regulation. The Group hopes to present its recommendations to me as Minister very shortly.

Depending on the recommendations of the Working Group, it is possible that other approaches to quality assurance may be developed for childminding, possibly on a temporary basis pending transition to full regulation. It is with that possibility in mind that the Heads of Bill and General Scheme for the Affordable Childcare Scheme proposes the possibility that approved providers under the Scheme may include both Tusla-registered providers and other approved providers whose quality has been assured by other mechanisms, to be specified in regulations. This proposed approach to the inclusion of childminders in the scheme is dependent on the development of a satisfactory approach to quality assurance. There is no question of providing subsidies where quality standards have not been assured.

Child Protection

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has satisfied herself that all necessary provisions to protect children in residential or foster care are in place and operational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22618/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla holds the statutory responsibility for child welfare and protection, and is the appropriate body to receive reports relating to the safety and well-being of a child. This applies to children under the age of 18, living in their own home or living in care. Each referral received by Tusla is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team.

There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care. Placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker, and the provision of care services is monitored by Tusla management and subject to inspections by the Health Information Quality Authority and by Tusla Registration Services.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care, or EPIC. Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tulsa, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

There is, however, no room for complacency about our safeguarding measures, and we will constantly review them to ensure that they are effective.

Children in Care

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children currently in residential care; the average duration of their care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22619/17]

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children currently in foster care; the average duration of their care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22620/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 and 267 together.

The most recent figures provided by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, indicate that there were 6,309 children in care at the end of February 2017, which is a decrease of 2% compared with the previous year.

Foster care is the preferred option for children who have been received into care. This can be as a result of abuse and/or neglect and their parents' inability to care for them due to a combination of difficulties in their own lives. Of the children in care at the end of February, 92% were in foster care nationally; there were 4,127 (65%) children in general foster care, 1,695 (27%) in relative care.

At the end of February, 355 (6%) children in care were in a residential placement. A child is placed in a residential setting only when they have an identified need that can be met by this service or for an intensive assessment or provision of specialist services. In general, these centres are based in domestic style homes in the community, and staffed by social care workers to attend to the needs of the child. Specialist supports are also made available, as needed, and many centres have specialist skill-sets and therapeutic modalities.

Tusla has advised that figures from 2015 are the most up to date regarding the duration of stay. I am advised that on the 31st December 2015 the total number of children in care was 6,384. The information on duration refers to all children in care and is not broken down by care type.

Duration of stay - children in care 31st December 2016

Duration of time in care	Number	% of total children in care
under 1 year	929	14.6%
1 - 5 years	2,715	42.5%
over 5 years	2,740	42.9%

Children in Care

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children or young adults with special needs currently in foster and residential care; the extent to which the situation in regard to their security and protection continues to be monitored; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22621/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, carried out a census of the young people in care with a diagnosed disability described as moderate to severe in September 2016. The census findings indicates that at that time there were 59 children in residential care, and 523 children in foster care, who have been diagnosed by a clinical specialist as having a moderate to severe disability.

It is important to note that information which affects a young person's care plan is ad-

dressed as part of care planning. A child in care will be allocated a social worker and a regularly reviewed care plan will be put in place. Children in care who have been diagnosed by a clinical specialist as having a moderate or severe disability may avail of disability services operated by the HSE, or from the private sector. Foster care placements are monitored by Tusla, for example by regular visits from the child's allocated social worker and the foster family's link worker. In addition, Tusla's services are subject to regulatory inspection, primarily by the Health Information and Quality Authority.

Any allegation involving a child is dealt with under Children First, and, under its policies and procedures, these are given child protection assessments. Where credible disclosures of welfare or abuse concerns are received, social workers act sensitively to protect the child, taking into account the negative impact that may arise from disrupting the life of the young person, when mitigating the risk to them. However, this is sometimes unavoidable, particularly where a young person must be moved to a new care setting.

With respect to young persons with special needs or mental health issues, a joint protocol for inter-agency collaboration has been recently published together by Tusla and the HSE, who are committed to implementing it across the country. The protocol clarifies the separate and distinct roles, responsibilities and legal requirements of both agencies and will ensure joint and effective management of the transition of young people with special needs and/or complex mental health issues to adult services. The Protocol also provides for a clear escalation process that can be used by Tusla or the HSE should an issue arise, or if there is an unresolved matter regarding access to appropriate, available services.

A young person is no longer in Tusla's care when they reach the age of 18 years. Where a young person with special needs has been in care with Tusla, the young person is supported in the transition to independent living or, where appropriate, transfer to adult services provided by the HSE. The aftercare planning is a collaborative approach that involves the young person, their families, their carers and relevant State bodies. In the case of vulnerable adults, the HSE has a national policy and safeguarding team in place.

Child Protection

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which the relevant bodies under her aegis can react to reports and-or concerns affecting children in all forms of care or in the home in which a strong suspicion exists in respect of their welfare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22622/17]

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 question to each of these bodies and asked them to provide the information sought directly to the Deputy.

Child Protection

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the legislation and the procedures arising therefrom to adequately protect children and vulnerable young adults in all situations in which their security and well-being may be threatened; the extent to which case officers are

appointed and can report in a reasonable time; the extent to which required action can take place to address issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22623/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the protection and welfare of children and believe that there is a moral duty on Government and on society to work together to protect children and to ensure their safety.

From my Department's perspective Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. Any child who resides in Ireland and who is not receiving adequate care and protection can be received into the care of the State if deemed to be the appropriate action required. Tusla is required under the 1991 Act to investigate allegations of abuse, including historical abuse, and to engage with An Garda Síochána where appropriate. Tusla has a key role in supporting some of the most vulnerable children and young people in State care. My Department provides funding for Tusla. In 2017 it 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, including family support; educational welfare; pre-school inspection and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. These services and supports are provided by Social Workers, Educational Welfare Officers, and Early Years Inspectors.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department is leading a review of the Child Care Act 1991. This work is being progressed in close cooperation with Tusla. The review process will also involve consultation with stakeholders.

The Children First Act 2015 was signed into law on 19th November last year. With the removal of the common law defence of reasonable chastisement, children now enjoy the full protection of the law in relation to assault. This new legislation will also provide for mandated reporting of child protection concerns and will require organisations working with children to prepare Child Safeguarding Statements. I have approved phased preparations for implementation of the remaining provisions of the Act in the period up to end 2017. The legislation will operate side-by-side with the existing non-statutory obligations provided for in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011. The Guidance is currently being revised and updated to take account of the new legislative obligations so as to provide in one place a comprehensive reference resource for individuals and organisations. A statutory Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group has been established to promote the importance of Children First compliance across Government and to ensure a consistent approach is adopted.

My Department has responsibility for the Oberstown Children Detention Campus and it has a range of procedural safeguards in place to ensure the safety and welfare of the children detained there.

The Deputy will of course be aware that there is a broad range of legislative protections for children across a range of Government Departments - Health, Education, Justice, Social Protection - which are embraced by the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Cyberbullying Issues

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the relevant bodies under her aegis have received notification of cyberbullying

among children and young adults; the action available or pending to address such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22624/17]

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 question to each of these bodies and asked them to provide the information sought directly to the Deputy.

Youth Services

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she and her Department continue to support voluntary agencies such as youth organisations involved in providing support for children and young people; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22625/17]

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.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. 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.

These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. In 2017, some €10.65m has been allocated under this scheme, a 5% increase over 2016.

This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

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 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715.

Youth Services Funding

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she continues to support the various programmes of Kildare youth services, with particular reference to the need to ensure supportive measures in their efforts to meet challenges as identified by them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22626/17]

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full extent of grant aid or other support available through her Department to the various youth organisations throughout the country, including County Kildare, in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22627/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273 and 274 together.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. 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.

In 2017, an amount of €525,425 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

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 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715, of which €102,624 was allocated to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board. The scheme was advertised by Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board last week and I am advised that the closing date is 26th May next.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has provided an allocation to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board for the provision of a full time youth officer for County Kildare in 2017. I am advised that this post has been advertised by the ETB I expect that the post will be filled shortly. In the interim, the ETB has a Youth Officer in place who is very active in both counties.

Juvenile Offenders

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to engage with juvenile offenders with a view to providing rehabilitative or educational supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22628/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Children Act 2001, as amended, provides the statutory basis for dealing with children who come into contact with the criminal justice system. The key principle of the Children Act 2001 is that

detention of a child should only be imposed as a last resort. When children come into contact with the criminal justice system there is an emphasis on the promotion of community based options in the first instance. The Irish Youth Justice Service oversees a significant investment in community based programmes to divert young people from further involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour. In 2016, approximately €17m has been allocated by the Department of Justice and Equality to the Irish Youth Justice Service to administer Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Young Persons Probation Projects and a number of other youth diversion community-based projects. These projects also benefit from support under the European Social Fund.

My Department provides funding to the Irish Youth Justice Service for services relating to the Oberstown Children Detention Campus (Oberstown) and the Bail Supervision Scheme which has recently been established on a pilot basis.

The Bail Supervision Scheme provides therapeutic supports in the community for children who are subject to bail conditions. The service is a ‘wraparound’ service to the young person and their family with a prescribed reporting system back to the courts through the appropriate statutory bodies; Probation Service, An Garda Síochána and Oberstown.

If a child is remanded or sentenced to a period of detention in Oberstown, a range of rehabilitative supports is offered as part of an overall programme, which focuses on the child’s individual needs and provides the framework for each child’s individual journey through detention. The focus is on developing supportive relationships with the main emphasis placed on education and rehabilitation.

The Assessment, Consultation and Therapy Service (ACTS) is a national service provided by Tusla; they provide clinical services to children in the community, children in detention and also in special care facilities. On admission to Oberstown an individual management plan is put in place for each child which includes a mental health assessment to determine the need for more specialist support provided by ACTS and short term interventions may continue when the child returns to the Community.

Oberstown also have service level agreements with EPIC, the Youth Advocacy Programme (YAP) and Le Chéile - Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services. These provide rehabilitative services to children and young people in detention and during their transition back to their home and community by providing mentoring and support to both the young person and their family.

The Department of Education and Skills provides education and training services through the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. These include both primary and secondary level courses as well as a wide range of vocational and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accredited awards through the Oberstown Education Centre.

The wide range of rehabilitation, education and support services provided and supported by the Irish Youth Justice Service are detailed in the Tackling Youth Crime: Youth Justice Action Plan 2014 – 2018, and a progress report covering the period 2014 to 2015, published in December 2016, is available on my Department’s website.

Youth Services

276. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the aspect of youth affairs that has generated most concern in the past eight years; the extent to which adequate action was taken; the quality and efficacy of measures put in place to address such issues; if further action is required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22629/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Prior to the establishment of my Department in 2011, funding for youth services was provided through a number of disparate funding schemes and administered by several Government Departments. Against this backdrop, my Department has engaged in a reform programme to ensure quality effective, value for money services that are evidence based and designed to secure the best outcomes for young people. In this regard you will be aware that the targeted schemes supporting youth services were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review. The review involved an in-depth scrutiny of the impact youth service provision has on young people's lives. The review made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. These included the merging the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund 1 and 2 and Local Drugs Task Force Projects into a single youth funding scheme. The work on the development of this 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 Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes over the coming years.

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. The schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations, the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme which supports youth work activities at a local level and the Youth Information Centre Scheme which funds twenty five Youth Information Centres.

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020, published in 2015 was developed in close consultation with statutory youth interests and the voluntary youth organisations and services that work with young people. The strategy sets out Government's aims for young people, aged 10 to 24 years, so that they are active and healthy, achieving their full potential in learning and development, safe and protected from harm, have economic security and opportunity and are connected and contributing to their world.

My Department, along with all government departments, was required to deliver substantial savings on all funding programmes in line with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012 – 2014. My Department sought to ensure that front line youth services, particularly those for the most vulnerable young people, were protected as far as is possible from the impact of any necessary reductions in funding. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that Budget 2017 has provided some €57m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. The increase of €5.5m, along with increases previously provided in Budget 2016 effectively reverses the cuts endured in recent years.

Military Aircraft

277. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if an Air Corps plane was prevented from entering Swedish airspace due to a failure to submit the necessary paperwork for clearance to a foreign country; the person or bodies responsible for this error; if there will be an investigation into the events; if the aircraft was low on fuel when making the return trip; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22424/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Air Corps operates two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, which are unarmed aircraft and primarily used for sea fisheries protection and maritime patrolling. They are also on occasion tasked with

providing support such as military transport to the wider Defence Forces.

With regard to this particular mission, the necessary paperwork was completed by the Department of Defence. Whilst in normal circumstances the CASA aircraft would have been cleared to enter Swedish airspace, the requirements of the Swedish authorities were not met on this occasion. I wish to assure the Deputy that we fully respect the laws, practices and procedures of other countries with respect to the control of military aircraft in their airspace. Similarly we expect other countries to respect our laws, practices and procedures with respect to the control of foreign military aircraft in our airspace.

Following the decision by the Swedish authorities to refuse access by our aircraft into their airspace, this aircraft was re-tasked mid-operation and it undertook a maritime patrol. The military authorities have assured me that the mission in its entirety was well within the aircraft's maximum endurance.

Naval Service Vessels

278. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the LÉ Eithne was delayed from leaving Haulbowline to help Italian authorities rescue migrants in the Mediterranean Sea; the length of time the LÉ Eithne was forced to remain in dock; if there will be an investigation into the events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22425/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There has been no delay in the deployment of the LÉ Eithne to support the Italian authorities in addressing the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea.

On 11 April 2017, the Government approved the despatch of a Naval vessel to the Mediterranean to undertake humanitarian search and rescue tasks as part of a bilateral arrangement with the Italian authorities. The Government decision provided that the deployment is subject to finalisation of a bilateral arrangement with the Italian authorities in relation to the operation of the mission and the landing of persons rescued.

Standard practice, since the first deployment of the Naval Service to the Mediterranean, has been that the Naval Service vessels do not depart their base in Haulbowline until the relevant diplomatic procedures are completed, which normally takes four to six weeks. This is necessary to ensure that the requisite coordination arrangements with the Italian authorities and the arrangements for the landing of rescued migrants are in place before a vessel commences operational duties. The requirement for completion of the diplomatic arrangements has been a feature of all Naval Service deployments to the Mediterranean to date and is well understood by all involved. As such, no date for a deployment had been determined and there has been no delay in the deployment of the vessel.

On receipt of the Government decision, the relevant communication was made to the Italian authorities by the Department of Defence through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Embassy in Rome. There has been ongoing contact with the Italian authorities in relation to this matter and I expect, in accordance with normal procedures, the exchange of diplomatic notes to be completed shortly. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Naval Vessel cannot deploy until all of the relevant diplomatic procedures have been completed in accordance with standing practice and the relevant Government decision.

Defence Forces Investigations

279. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the expected date for completion of the report of the independent review of the investigation into the death of a person and disappearance of another person (details supplied) in Lebanon; his plans to publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22493/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In December 2014, the then Minister for Defence, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., appointed former High Court Judge, Mr. Roderick Murphy to conduct an independent review of the investigation of the death of Private Hugh Doherty and the disappearance of Private Kevin Joyce (Caomhán Seoighe) on 27 April 1981 while serving as members of the Irish Battalion with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Privates Doherty and Joyce were serving with UNIFIL in 1981 when, on 27 April 1981, an observation post at Dayr Ntar manned by them came under attack. Private Doherty was later found dead from gunshot wounds and Private Joyce was missing. The attackers are unknown. Over the years, extensive diplomatic and military efforts to locate Private Joyce have proved fruitless. To date, no information has been elicited to lead to the recovery of Private Joyce's remains.

In late June 2015, Mr. Roderick Murphy presented his draft report to the Minister for Defence. Following a review of his report a number of clarifications were raised with Mr. Murphy which were addressed. The Department of Defence also sought and received legal advice from the Attorney General in relation to the publication of the report. In March 2016, a copy of the draft report was forwarded on a confidential basis to the families and persons identified by the Reviewer for comment prior to publication of the report. The Reviewer received comments from families and a number of persons identified. He has considered these comments and has amended the draft Report where he has considered it appropriate to do so. As a result of this exercise further legal advice was sought from the Attorney General. This advice has been received and is under consideration with a view to finalising the report. It is intended to publish the report once all issues have been finalised.