

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

19. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Canada on 3 May 2017. [21949/17]

21. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the Canadian Prime Minister and events on his trip to Canada. [22089/17]

22. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Canada and his meeting with the Canadian Prime Minister; if CETA was discussed; and the other meetings that he attended and the issues that were discussed. [22095/17]

23. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent trip to Canada and any discussions that took place regarding CETA. [22107/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 21 to 23, inclusive, together.

I travelled to Canada between the 3-6 May. This was the first visit to Canada by a serving Taoiseach in more than a decade, and provided an opportunity to develop and strengthen the important bilateral relationship between our two nations, who share deep historic ties, and enjoy strong trading relations. Over the centuries, Canada has been an important destination for Irish immigrants. Today, over four and a half million Canadians - more than 14% of the country's population - claim Irish ancestry.

During my visit I had a series of engagements with political, business and civic society representatives in Montreal and Toronto, and met with a number of existing and potential new IDA and Enterprise Ireland client companies. These engagements provided very useful opportunities for me to promote Ireland as a location for trade and investment, as well as to emphasise our commitment to the EU and to outline Ireland's priorities in the context of Brexit.

While in Montreal, I met with Prime Minister Trudeau. We discussed the trade relationship between Ireland and Canada and Ireland's strengths as a location for trade and investment. We also considered ways to further strengthen the economic and trade relationship between our two countries, and agreed to prioritise the opportunities offered by the CETA trade agreement. I also updated the Prime Minister on Ireland's Brexit priorities and outlined to him the current position in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister reiterated to me the Canadian Government's

continued support for the Northern Ireland peace process.

Also in Montreal, I attended a business lunch with senior members of the Montreal business community, where I met with potential and current investors in Ireland. I also visited the School of Irish studies at Concordia University where I met with members of the Irish Diaspora.

In Toronto, I addressed an Enterprise Ireland event, and also an event hosted by the Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce, both of which provided me opportunities to meet with current and potential investors in Ireland. I addressed a Tourism Ireland event and visited Ireland Park, the Irish Famine memorial park in Toronto. I also paid a courtesy call on the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Elizabeth Dowdeswell. My Programme concluded with a meeting with members of the Board of the Irish Canada Immigration Centre and other representatives of the Irish Diaspora, and an event with representatives of the Ireland Fund in Canada.

This was a very successful visit which I believe will provide a platform to further strengthen the bilateral relations between Ireland and Canada - and I expect will be further enhanced during the trade mission to Canada that will be led by Minister Mitchell O'Connor later this month (30 May to 02 June).

Question No. 20 resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 21 to 23, inclusive, answered with Question No. 19.

Question No. 24 resubmitted.

Ministerial Advisers Appointments

25. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach his plans to appoint new special advisers generally or in the area of economics or Brexit. [22090/17]

The Taoiseach: I have no plans to appoint new Special Advisers.

Seanad Reform

26. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding the group being formed to reform Seanad Éireann as agreed in 2016. [22098/17]

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy will be aware, in the Programme for a Partnership Government the Government stated its intention to reform Seanad Éireann and committed to pursuing implementation of the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform (the Manning Report).

That Report was published in 2015 and it is available on my Department's website.

One of the recommendations of the Report was the establishment of an Implementation Group to oversee implementation of the reforms contained in the Report.

As I have previously said in the House, I agreed with a suggestion made here some time ago by the Deputy that this Group should be based in the Oireachtas and should comprise members of the Dáil and Seanad from all parties and groups, with access to independent expert advice as required. I wrote to Party Leaders in September last year seeking their agreement to this approach and their intention to participate. Contacts are continuing with parties to finalise nominations with a view to having the Group up and running as soon as possible.

Questions Nos. 27 to 30, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 31 to 41, inclusive, answered orally.

Defence Forces Training

42. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding plans for a peace and leadership institute on the Curragh; the next steps in the plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23328/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence included a commitment to evaluating the potential development of a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training at the Defence Forces Training Centre in The Curragh. Also, the Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to developing this Institute. It is foreseen that the new Institute will have international standing and contribute to the overall development of knowledge and experience in the areas of peace support, leadership and conflict resolution.

Scoping work was carried out on the proposal throughout 2016. A concept paper has been developed and some initial consultation with national and international third level and research institutes and potential philanthropic contributors has also taken place.

Arising from the initial scoping work and consultations, it has been decided to progress to conduct a feasibility study. Terms of reference for this feasibility study are being finalised and I expect that the study will commence as soon as possible thereafter.

Defence Forces Properties

43. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department will ensure that essential works that are required in the schools located in the Curragh Camp will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23258/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are currently three schools located within the Curragh Camp - the Curragh Post Primary School, the Curragh Boys National School and the Curragh Girls National School.

The Department of Education and Skills has a range of responsibilities including the provision of primary and secondary education to children throughout the State. The schools located in the Curragh Camp are non-fee paying, public schools.

For historical reasons and due to the nature of the Curragh Camp, the buildings in use as schools are the property of the Department of Defence. The Department of Defence does not charge the Department of Education and Skills for the use of these buildings. However, given their usage, the maintenance and upkeep of the schools is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Defence Forces Remuneration

44. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if sailors in the Naval Service who served on migrant rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea received

the extra payments agreed in November 2016; the reason for the delay in payment; the steps he will take to ensure that future such payments will not be delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23265/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): An additional payment in respect of personnel who deployed to the humanitarian mission in the Mediterranean on Operation Pontus was agreed through the Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force by PDFORRA, the Representative Association for enlisted personnel.

This payment was subsequently authorised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on 29 March 2017. On receipt of approval for payment of the additional amount, the Department issued instructions to its payroll provider – the Payroll Shared Services Centre (PSSC) – to make the payments due. The amounts involved were included with pay for serving personnel on the weekly payroll of 3 May 2017. Work is ongoing on the payment of amounts due to a small number of former personnel who have left the Permanent Defence Force and are no longer on the payroll system.

In the case of the Operation Pontus allowance, the arrears would normally have been paid within a shorter period after receipt of approval from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. However, in this particular case, payment was not made during April due to the migration, during April, of the Permanent Defence Force enlisted personnel payroll to the Department's new payroll provider – the Payroll Shared Services Centre.

This significant project required the putting in place of revised payroll arrangements during April on a once off basis, including the temporary re-scheduling of payroll deadlines.

I am pleased that this matter of the additional payment has now been concluded.

Ministerial Meetings

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the nature, scale, scope and subject matter of the discussions he has had with the UN Under-Secretary-General and head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23324/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On 26 April 2017, while representing Ireland at an informal meeting of Defence Ministers in Malta, I was delighted to have had the opportunity to meet with the UN Under Secretary General (UN/USG), Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix. While this was an introductory meeting, a comprehensive range of issues in relation to peacekeeping operations were discussed. I also took the opportunity to brief him on my recent visit to Ireland's troops serving on UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and in the Golan Heights.

Under Secretary General Lacroix welcomed Irish/Finnish cooperation in UNIFIL and expressed his appreciation for Ireland's ongoing support to the mission. Our discussion addressed the recently published UN Strategic Review of UNIFIL which determined that UNIFIL is well configured to implement its mandated tasks and continues to be a credible, flexible and mobile force. That Review also states that the overall strategic political guidance is to maintain UNIFIL at its current strength, composition and configuration and it was clear from our discussion that the UN Under Secretary General supports this view.

With regard to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) mission, we

were in agreement that the presence of the UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring the continuing ceasefire between Israel and Syria and in the wider Middle East Region. The valuable contribution that the Defence Forces are making to this mission was acknowledged. The UN Under Secretary took note of the security concerns I outlined regarding the return of troops to the Area of Separation.

We spoke about the recent debate on Peacekeeping Operations in the UN Security Council. Under Secretary General Lacroix indicated that while challenges were identified in terms of funding, the added value of Peacekeeping Operations was acknowledged. He is confident, however, that the UN can achieve efficiencies, while maintaining the effectiveness of UN operations.

In relation to Mali, Under Secretary General Lacroix agreed with my assessment that the challenges there are wide ranging and require a wider response than can be delivered by peacekeeping operations alone.

It was a very worthwhile meeting and I look forward to having further discussions with the UN Under Secretary General in the future.

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

46. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to recruit new members to the Reserve Defence Forces in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23268/17]

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

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

Recruitment to both the PDF and RDF remains a priority in 2017. Membership of the RDF is voluntary and unpaid and the quest for recruits must compete with the other organisations within the voluntary sector. These conditions along with the unique demands of military service make the issue of attracting recruits to the Reserve a challenging one. This challenge is not unique to Ireland.

In the context of both finite resources and personnel, it is necessary to strike an appropriate balance in terms of PDF and RDF recruitment, so as to deliver the desired effects of maintaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to undertake all roles assigned to it by Government and to advance the single force structure.

It is anticipated the next RDF recruitment campaign will commence in the second half of 2017. Until then the RDF will continue to induct from the 2015/2016 panel. The Defence Forces are reviewing the 2015/2016 RDF competition and as part of this process are examining

the competition model to be used in 2017. I wish to see an acceleration in the rate of recruitment to the Reserve within the available means and resources.

Defence Forces Strength

47. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he expects Permanent Defence Force numbers to reach the current agreed ceiling of 9,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23264/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda for the next ten years. It also considers the defence capabilities required so that the Defence Forces can successfully deliver on the roles assigned by Government.

In this context, the White Paper on Defence also highlights a number of medium and long term strategies in the area of manpower planning. The White Paper addresses the need to review and develop rolling medium term planning requirements so as to deliver an effective and efficient workforce mix in terms of age profile, skills, competencies and experience, and current policies to support this will be further developed and implemented. To that end, a number of White Paper projects are currently underway and are being jointly developed by military and civil personnel.

The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

On an ongoing basis, the manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. As with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel in particular areas of expertise.

I am advised by the Military Authorities that a total of 590 General Service Recruits were enlisted into the Permanent Defence Force in 2016, of which 501 Recruits were enlisted in the Army and 89 Recruits were enlisted in the Naval Service. In addition, 100 Cadetships were awarded following the 2016 Cadetship Competitions.

I am advised by the military authorities that their planned target is to induct approximately 850 new entrants to the Defence Forces across all services and competition streams in 2017.

A new General Service Recruitment campaign was launched on 23 February 2017 and the 2017 Cadetship competition was launched in March 2017. Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. An Air Corps apprentice class was also inducted in March 2017.

Promotions are ongoing within Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies. A new NCO promotions competition to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above has been launched from which promotions will commence in Q3 2017.

I remain committed to increasing recruitment to the Defence Forces and it is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence and in the context of the policy and strategy regarding recruitment set out in the

Public Procurement Regulations

48. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to review procurement procedures in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23261/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The procurement of goods and services by the Defence Forces is carried out in accordance with public procurement policy and national and European Union law. Procurement procedures in the Defence Forces are kept under constant review to ensure they are in line with best practice, guidance and the legal framework.

A wide range of non-capital goods and services are procured directly by the Defence Forces. These include items associated with day-to-day operations such as food, clothing, transport, utilities and the maintenance of equipment and premises. The services of the Office of Government Procurement and centralised framework agreements are also used to acquire items that may be in common demand in the Public Sector. Other programmes of expenditures such as capital expenditure on major defensive equipment platforms for the Army, Naval Service and the Air Corps are managed by officials in my Department. However, in practice there is close civil-military collaboration on a daily basis in respect of a variety of procurement projects.

The procurement policies, procedures and applicable legislation in place are designed to ensure that the highest standards of integrity, fairness, legality, confidentiality and disclosure of interest are applied to all procurement related transactions. All relevant procurement regulations including those set out in the Public Procurement Guidelines – Competitive Process are applied to ensure that competition is promoted, value for money secured and openness and transparency assured.

Public procurement rules are adapted to the specificities of defence procurements, which can be particularly complex and sensitive. Procurement of defence and security equipment such as weapons, munitions and material for defence purposes is carried out in accordance with EU Directive 2009/90/EC. This is a specific Directive relating to the award of contracts dealing with the defence and security area which provides rules that enhance transparency and openness in defence markets while also ensuring that individual countries' security concerns are protected. This Directive was transposed into Irish law by way of implementing S.I. No. 62 of 2012.

Procurement is also carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Public Spending Code, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Code is designed to ensure that the State gets the best possible value for resources at its disposal. The requirements of the Code are based on employing best practices at all stages of the equipment expenditure cycle.

Procedures are in place in the Defence Organisation to provide a forum for oversight and approval of expenditure and to ensure that expenditure is profiled and monitored on an ongoing basis. In this regard a High Level Planning and Procurement Group (HLPPG) comprising of senior civil and military management of the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, and an associated Working Group meet on a monthly basis. The Group also develops and implements multi-annual rolling plans for the Defence Forces for equipment procurement and disposal and infrastructural development (including property acquisition) based on the policy

priorities in the White Paper.

I am advised that procurement procedures in the Defence Forces are kept under constant review to support good procurement practice, project management and good corporate governance, and to ensure that tender processes are carried out in an appropriate manner.

Naval Service Operations

49. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to deploy the Naval Service on a humanitarian mission in the Mediterranean; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23092/17]

64. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the LÉ Eithne is due to depart to the Mediterranean; if there have been delays with regard to its dispatch; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23262/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Question No 49 and 64 together.

On 11 April 2017, the Government approved the return of a Naval vessel to the Mediterranean to undertake humanitarian search and rescue tasks. 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.

I wish to assure the Deputy, that there has been no delay in the deployment of a Naval vessel to support the Italian authorities in addressing the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. A date for deployment of L.É. Eithne will be determined when the diplomatic arrangements have been finalised.

Air Corps Equipment

50. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the support the Air Corps has been able to provide when assisting emergency services dealing with serious gorse and forest fires; the type of equipment available to the Air Corps when attempting to extinguish such fires; and his plans to upgrade or modify its existing air fleet in order that it is better equipped to assist in tackling out-of-control fires in view of the damage caused by gorse and forest fires in recent weeks. [23195/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence (2015) outlines the fact that Defence Forces' capabilities are primarily developed for security purposes and this remains the key capability driver. In this context, the White Paper sets out the investment priorities for the Air Corps. A unique feature of Ireland's defence policy

is the extent to which these capabilities are used towards other ends.

The Deputy will appreciate that while the Defence Forces are not a Principal Response Agency as defined in the Framework for Major Emergency Management, the Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Principle Response Agency in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in an Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) role.

The Air Corps provided assistance to the emergency services fighting gorse and forest fires in Counties Sligo and Galway in recent weeks dropping approximately 197,000 litres of water onto the fires.

The Air Corps utilised the AW139 helicopter in the fire fighting role using the “bambi bucket” to deliver water to the scene of the fire. The bucket can carry up to 1,200 litres of water at a time. This water can be delivered by the helicopter quickly and accurately, and is particularly useful when dealing with fires in remote areas.

The Air Corps also deployed an EC-135 helicopter to facilitate command and control of the fire fighting operation.

The Deputy might also note that, in addition to Air Corps assistance, 49 personnel drawn from Renmore Barracks (An Chead Cathlan Cois) were also deployed to assist with fire-fighting efforts in Oughterard Co. Galway. These personnel were also operating in an Aid to Civil Authority capacity and they assisted with the suppression of secondary fires.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces continue to be developed in line with requirements needed to fulfil all roles that are assigned to them by Government.

Defence Forces Contracts

51. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on Ireland increasing its purchasing of military hardware from Israel; his further views on whether these purchases are ethical in view of recent conflict in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23083/17]

60. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the value of contracts for equipment, goods or services procured from Israeli-based firms and companies over the past five years by the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23277/17]

62. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent on drones and other equipment procured from Israel since 2013; his future plans on procuring equipment from Israel; and his views on whether in view of Israel’s appalling human rights record it is unethical and against the wishes of the vast majority of persons that Ireland continues trading with Israel. [23197/17]

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the recent purchase of drones to the value of €1.9 million from Israel by the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23969/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51, 60, 62 and 71 together.

The primary focus for the procurement of defensive equipment by the Department of Defence is to maintain the capability of the Irish Defence Forces to fulfil the roles as assigned by Government. This includes undertaking overseas Peace Support Operations, and in this regard

to afford the greatest possible force protection to Irish troops whilst on all missions.

The principle of competitive tendering for Government contracts is used by the Department of Defence for the acquisition of defensive equipment for the Defence Forces. Central to those procedures is the requirement to allow fair competition between suppliers through the submission of tenders following advertising of the tender competition on the e-tenders site and on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU), where appropriate, in line with the EU procurement directives, including the Directive on the procurement of Defensive and Security Equipment.

Such tender competitions are open to any company or country in accordance with the terms of all UN, OSCE and EU arms embargos or restrictions. There are no such restrictions or embargos in place on Israeli companies.

In following these guidelines and codes, the Department of Defence must deal impartially with all companies that are entitled to enter its procurement competitions and must evaluate tenders on the basis of objective criteria.

The value of contracts for equipment, goods or services procured from Israeli based firms and companies since 2012 is €5.86m, this includes the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles currently operated by the Defence Forces, commonly referred to as UAVs.

These UAVs, are, in effect, an information gathering asset which have no offensive capability. They do not carry weapons. The UAV systems were acquired to enhance the capability of the Defence Forces to carry out surveillance, intelligence gathering and target acquisition for Peace Support Operations and provide a low cost, low risk means to increase capabilities and enhance force protection by performing missions which do not demand the use of manned aircraft.

UAVs have a wide range of civilian and military applications, particularly in the area of surveillance over land and sea. They have the ability to perform tasks that manned systems cannot perform, either for safety or for economic reasons. UAVs can efficiently complement existing manned aircraft or satellites infrastructure used in environmental protection, maritime surveillance, natural disasters, crisis management, border control, etc.

Following a competitive tender process, 4 UAV Systems were procured between 2007 and 2009 from Aeronautics Defense Systems Ltd based in Israel. An upgrade of the Defence Forces UAV systems was carried out by the original equipment manufacturer in 2016 at a cost of €1.9m ex VAT. This involved the upgrade of 4 UAV systems, with 3 airframes in each system.

The matter of barring Israeli companies from entering tender competitions for the provision of military goods would be akin to Ireland unilaterally placing an embargo on such goods from Israel and this raises, inter alia, serious implications for Irish foreign policy which are outside my remit.

Trade policy and market access are largely EU competencies and any restriction or ban on imports from any particular country would have to be concerted at EU level.

The manner in which the Department of Defence procures both goods and services remains consistent with international best practice and is in line with EU and UN decisions on trade embargos. I am satisfied that this is the appropriate way in which to continue, rather than Ireland taking any unilateral decision to target individual companies or countries in that respect.

52. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the projected number of personnel will be based in Custume barracks, Athlone, in view of the fact that on the announcement of the Defence Forces reorganisation in 2012, the projected permanent Defence Forces strength for the barracks was 971 personnel. [23323/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The current strength of Defence Force personnel at Custume barracks, Athlone on 15 May, 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, was 886 personnel across all ranks.

The re-organisation in 2013 did not significantly alter the actual number of PDF personnel serving in Custume Barracks, Athlone. In accordance with the revised organisational structures, as of 30 November 2012 the establishment for Units based in Custume Barracks is 995 personnel.

The effect of the re-organisation on Custume Barracks is that the actual number of PDF personnel based in Custume Barracks has been stabilised within an overall strength ceiling of 9,500 PDF personnel.

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

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

European Council Meetings

53. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will be attending the EU Foreign Affairs Council defence meeting taking place on 18 May 2017; the items on the agenda for discussion at the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23082/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I will be attending the formal Council of Foreign Affairs with Defence Ministers (FAC Defence) scheduled to take place on the 18th May, 2017, in Brussels. The meeting will be preceded by a meeting of the European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board in Defence Ministers format. This session will primarily focus on the long term review of the EDA, implementation of key taskings and next steps, and acceptance of a new Ad-Hoc Programme regarding the establishment of a Cooperative Financial Mechanism.

Chaired by the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Ms. Frederica Mogherini, the first session of FAC Defence will focus on implementation of the EU Global Strategy in the area of security and defence. Discussions are expected to centre on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO); the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD); EU Battlegroups and 3rd Country CSDP Partnerships. The Commission will also provide an update on The European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) and the European Defence Fund. It is expected that Ministers will adopt Conclusions on progress in implementing the Global Strategy in the area of security and defence.

The second session will feature EU-NATO cooperation where Ministers will discuss the

state of play of EU-NATO cooperation and the implementation of the Warsaw Joint Declaration.

The final session will consist of a working joint lunch of Defence and Home Affairs Ministers focusing on counterterrorism.

Defence Forces Remuneration

54. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the numbers of members of the Defence Forces who must rely or relied on family income supplement to survive in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23266/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The circumstances surrounding an application for Family Income Supplement, or indeed any other scheme operated by the Department of Social Protection, is a private matter between the applicant and the Department of Social Protection. I am, therefore, not aware of the eligibility of individual members of the Permanent Defence Force to receive such allowances, or the total numbers of Defence Force members that may be in receipt of this financial support.

In terms of remuneration going forward, the new Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC), published their Report on 9 May 2017, the Government intends to initiate negotiations on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations. Future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will be dealt with within this process.

EU Meetings

55. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he attended the recent informal meeting of EU defence Ministers; if so, the matters discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23081/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I attended the recent informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers in Valetta, Malta, which took place on 26th and 27th April 2017. This was an informal meeting and as such no decisions are taken on any matter.

On 26 April, Ministers received a briefing from Operation Commander, Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino on 'Operation Sophia', which is the EU naval operation against human smugglers and traffickers. The mission is also providing capacity building and training to the Libyan Coastguard and Navy and contributing to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 2292 (UNSCR 2292). UNSCR 2292 imposes an arms embargo on Libya in an effort to prevent the flow of illicit arms and related materiel into that country.

On 27th April, Ministers discussed and exchanged views on:

- Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations with a focus on Libya, the Mediterranean Naval CSDP mission 'Operation Sophia' and CSDP missions in the Sahel.
- Ongoing work on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).
- Ongoing work on the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD). Ongoing work by

the Commission on their European Defence Action Plan (EDAP), including the proposal for a European Defence Fund.

- The issue of strengthening the EU 's Rapid Response toolbox, including EU Battlegroups, in particular to reinforce their modularity, preparation and effective financing.

In the margins of the meeting I met with the UN Under Secretary General (UN/USG), Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix where *inter alia* we had a detailed exchange of views in relation to Peace-keeping Operations, in particular UNIFIL, UNDOF and MINUSMA, UN support for EU Battle Groups and funding to the United Nations.

Defence Forces Reorganisation

56. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the reduction of Army field engineer companies from three to two arising from the 2012 Defence Forces reorganisation has decreased the capacity of the Defence Forces to aid the civil authorities in areas such as forest and gorse fires, maintenance of essential national services and national disasters in times of emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23260/17]

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

As a result of the re-organisation, the operational capacity of the Defence Forces has been optimised to the greatest extent possible, within the available resource envelope. Also of significance however, is the fact that the re-organisation has led to an improvement in the deployability and sustainability of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas, and has allowed it to continue to fulfil all roles assigned in the White Paper on Defence.

One of the roles assigned is to provide Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) supports to lead agencies responsible for dealing with emergencies. Although the Defence Forces are not a Principal Response Agency, as defined in the Framework for Major Emergency Management, the Defence Forces have provided very significant assistance to the emergency services fighting gorse and forest fires in Counties Sligo and Galway in recent weeks. In this regard, an Air Corps AW139 helicopter dropped approximately 197,000 litres of water onto the fires whilst an EC-135 helicopter facilitated command and control of the fire fighting operation. In addition to the Air Corps assistance, 49 army personnel were deployed to assist with the fire fighting effort in Oughterard, Co. Galway.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces made a very significant contribution in support of the emergency services and that the 2012 re-organisation has not diminished the response capabilities of the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Operations

57. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has given consideration to Defence Forces participation in EU efforts to counteract illegal person trafficking and to disrupt the business model of criminal elements involved in such activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23093/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The EU Common Security and Defence Policy naval operation EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Sophia), against human smugglers and traffickers, is one element of a comprehensive approach to addressing the migration crisis in the South Central Mediterranean. The mission is also providing capacity building and training to the Libyan Coastguard and Navy and contributing to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 2292 (UNSCR 2292). UNSCR 2292 imposes an arms embargo on Libya in an effort to prevent the flow of illicit arms and related materiel into that country.

The Council Decision to launch the mission was adopted at the formal Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 22 June 2015.

Operation Sophia is being implemented in sequential phases. The first phase, to support the detection and monitoring of migration networks through information gathering and patrolling in accordance with international law, is complete. The second phase involving the targeting, seizure and diversion of the vessels of human smugglers and traffickers remains ongoing. The third phase, will involve taking all necessary measures against vessels including disposal or rendering them inoperable. No political discussions have yet taken place at EU level on the commencement of the third phase. The requirement for a UN Security Council Resolution or consent of coastal State also applies to the third phase, neither of which is in place.

While Ireland is fully supportive of the EU approach to the migration crisis, we have not, to date, participated in this EU military mission.

The question of any future deployment to the EU mission and the nature of any such deployment will be examined in the context of the outcome of a Strategic Review of Operation Sophia, which is currently underway, the nature and mandate of the EU mission following review, the ongoing situation in the Mediterranean and the overall EU response thereto. Other factors to be taken into consideration include the demands on the Defence Forces, our overseas commitments and available resources. The Strategic Review of Operation Sophia is expected to be completed by mid year.

Any plans to deploy 12 or more naval service personnel and/or a naval vessel to participate as part of EUNAVFOR MED, Operation Sophia would be subject to Government and Dáil approval.

As the deputy will be aware, Ireland has undertaken a humanitarian search and rescue mission in the Mediterranean in 2015 and 2016 called Operation Pontus. This humanitarian mission has resulted in the rescue of over 15,600 migrants to date.

On 11 April 2017, the Government approved the return of a Naval vessel to the Mediterranean to continue to undertake humanitarian search and rescue tasks. 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. A date for deployment of the Naval vessel will be determined when the diplomatic arrangements have been completed.

Army Barracks

58. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has been contacted by a group (details supplied) seeking to use Mullingar barracks as temporary accommodation to house homeless veterans; his views on these requests; his further views on using Mullingar barracks for such purposes; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [23193/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In December 2016 I met with representatives of the Irish United Nations Veterans (IUNVA) and discussed the future use of Columb Barracks with them. As the Deputy may be aware in 2014, IUNVA were provided with accommodation within the Barracks specifically for the purpose of holding meetings of the local Mullingar Branch. This premises occupied by IUNVA is not suitable for residential accommodation in its current state. Any refurbishment would require significant investment to meet the required standards from a Health and Safety perspective. I advised IUNVA that as the Barracks is no longer required for military purposes the current financial and administrative burden resulting from the retention of the Barracks cannot be sustained by my Department.

The disposal of the Barracks must now be progressed in keeping with the Government's policy to dispose of surplus property no longer required for military purposes.

On the 27 of April Mr Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, launched the online Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map as a key part of the Rebuilding Ireland initiative. Columb Barracks has been included as one of the publicly owned sites which has potential for housing development. The Department will be exploring all avenues including public auction regarding the disposal of the Barracks in the coming months. In that context my officials will be contacting all existing occupants of the Barracks, including IUNVA, to discuss future arrangements.

Protected Disclosures

59. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has received and read a recent protected disclosure on serious breaches of health and safety procedures at Casement Aerodrome, including claims that personnel have died prematurely as a result of handling hazardous chemicals without adequate protection from retired Air Corps personnel who worked on the base; and his plans to deal with these latest revelations. [23196/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are a number of elements to the correspondence to which the Deputy refers. I am arranging for the elements of the correspondence which relate to previous protected disclosures concerning health and safety issues in the Air Corps to be sent to the independent third party I appointed last year to review those allegations. Legal advice has recently been received in respect of the correspondence referred to by the Deputy and is being considered.

Once a final review is to hand, I will determine any further steps required and ensure that all recommendations will be acted upon to ensure the safety of the men and women of the Air Corps.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 51.

Army Barracks

61. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for Columb barracks, Mullingar. [23325/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following the closure of Columb Barracks in 2012, my Department has explored a number of avenues to try and secure the long term future of the former barracks for the benefit of the local community. Government Departments and other Public Bodies, including Westmeath County Council, have been invited to declare any interest in acquiring the property. Westmeath County Council has recently confirmed that they have no interest in acquiring the property.

In 2016 Officials from my Department met with the CEO and officials of Longford and Westmeath Educational and Training Board regarding possible use of Mullingar Barracks. The meeting included a visit to the Barracks. To date, I have received no proposals from the Board regarding their future use of the barracks. There has also been no approach from the Department of Education and Skills in relation to this matter.

In May 2016 officials from my Department attended a public meeting in Mullingar on the future use of the barracks. A local group was subsequently established in order to prepare a feasibility study on community use of the barracks. However to date no report from that group has been furnished to my Department.

As the Barracks is no longer required for military purposes the current financial and administrative burden resulting from the retention of the Barracks cannot be sustained.

On the 27 of April Mr Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, launched the online Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map as a key part of the Rebuilding Ireland initiative. Columb Barracks has been included as one of the publicly owned sites which has potential for housing development. The Department will be exploring all avenues including public auction regarding the disposal of the Barracks in the coming months. In that context my officials will be contacting all existing occupants of the Barracks to discuss future arrangements.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 51.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 36.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 49.

Air Corps Equipment

65. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department investigated claims that students from the University of Limerick were exposed to hazardous chemicals and organic solvents during the course of their work placement at Casement Aerodrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23305/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Deputy may be aware that I received correspondence on 26 April 2017 which was also sent to a number of other Oireachtas members. There was a reference to University of Limerick students in that correspondence but without any specific detail in relation to the students.

I am arranging for the elements of the correspondence which relate to previous protected disclosures concerning health and safety issues in the Air Corps to be sent to the independent third party I appointed last year to review those allegations. Legal advice has recently been received in respect of the correspondence referred to by the Deputy and is being considered.

Once a final review is to hand, I will determine any further steps required and ensure that all recommendations will be acted upon.

Defence Forces Properties

66. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress that has been made in negotiations with overholders in accommodation in the Curragh camp; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23259/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Some 19 houses which were occupied by overholders in the Curragh camp have been returned by the occupants to the Department in recent times. However overholding continues to be an issue with up to 23 houses still being occupied by overholders in the Curragh Camp. The Department continues to seek the return of these properties.

The Department does not have a role in the provision of housing accommodation for the general public. The Department does however assist in whatever way it can in order to resolve the cases of overholding without recourse to legal action, as it is preferable not to have to use legal means to obtain vacant possession of the properties concerned.

In this context, officials from my Department have met with overholders to determine what assistance can be provided to enable them to vacate the properties. If individuals are not in a position to secure housing in their own right it may be the case that they qualify for social housing or that they qualify for some level of housing assistance. When requested to do so, the Department provides whatever documentation it can to support such applications.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department will deal with any overholders who are in a vulnerable position, in a sensitive manner and will, where possible, work with the local authorities to help identify solutions.

Defence Forces Remuneration

67. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to address the endemic low pay among personnel in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23276/17]

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

I believe that measures contained in the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) and the provisions introduced in Budget 2016 and 2017 will be of benefit generally to members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF). The provisions set out in the LRA are an extension of the provision of the Haddington Road Agreement and all existing dispute resolution procedures continue to apply.

The LRA provided for increased salaries during 2016 and 2017 in a manner which benefited the lower paid. These benefits come in the form of increases in gross pay in 2016 for those earning up to €31,000 and in 2017 for all those earning up to €65,000. In addition the Government has introduced legislation which has commenced the process to reduce the pay reduction applied under the FEMPI Acts.

In relation to the Pensions Related Deduction (PRD), which is commonly referred to as the 'Pension Levy', the exemption threshold for payment of the 'Levy' will increase substantially during the course of the agreement from €15,000 to €28,750 which means that annual income subject to the levy below €28,750 will no longer be liable to the deduction.

In terms of remuneration going forward, following the publication of the Pay Commission's report on 9 May 2017, the Government intends to initiate negotiations on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations. Future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will be dealt with within this process.

Curragh Plains Representative Forum

68. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the work of the Curragh forum; when it last met and is next due to meet; if progress has been made on agreeing a work programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23327/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): At the last meeting of the Curragh Forum on the 29 October 2016, several actions were agreed by the members of the Forum to assist in addressing a number of the problems in the Curragh. In line with agreed actions, a review of the Curragh Bye-Laws and the Curragh of Kildare Act is progressing with a view to identifying what amendments can possibly be made to provide greater powers to deal with the issues of illegal encampments, illegal dumping, illegal parking and the other key issues identified by the Forum.

In addition, my officials have recently introduced revised procedures regarding the branding and documenting of sheep grazing on the Curragh Plains. These changes will assist in having greater control of the numbers of sheep grazing. Actions to address over grazing will also be progressed in 2017.

Plans are being prepared to facilitate progress of a number of other agreed actions including signage and the development of facilities on the Curragh environs. There are currently no dates agreed for further meetings but my officials are available to meet with members of the Forum to discuss key issues as they arise.

International Terrorism

69. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the additional initiatives the Defence Forces are taking in the wake of international terror attacks over the past 18 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23263/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence, published in the Autumn of 2015, considered the security environment, including the threat from international terrorism. It notes that the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for protecting the internal security of the State. The Defence Forces provide, on request, supports in aid to the civil power (ATCP) of an ongoing and contingent nature.

In this context, the security environment is kept under constant review. An Garda Síochána can request a broad range of supports from the Defence Forces including Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams and the Army Ranger Wing. On-going coordination and liaison meetings take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and, based on ongoing threat assessments, the Gardaí and the Defence Forces liaise with regard to possible Defence Forces supports required for a range of contingencies. In this context, I can confirm that there is very active cooperation between an Garda Síochána and Defence Forces including exercises.

The White Paper on Defence set the defence capability agenda for the next decade. In recognising the dynamic nature of the security environment, the Government decided that the Defence Forces would continue to retain a range of flexible conventional military capabilities, in order to meet the roles assigned and as a hedge to future uncertainty.

There are a broad range of White Paper projects currently being implemented which are intended to identify, and develop and maintain such capabilities. It remains a top priority for me and my Department to implement the White Paper projects and ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Brexit Issues

70. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to re-deploy personnel to the Border region should a hard border be reintroduced in view of Brexit; if his Department held discussions on this aspect; if his Department assessed the number of officers needed in areas of counties Cavan and Monaghan to man the Border if that were to happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23304/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department is engaged in forward planning for the UK exit from the EU. While the implications for the border will emerge during the course of the negotiations, it is this Government's stated goal to try to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners. The fact of a UK exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements at this time. The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review. There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place.

In recent years a range of measures have been introduced in order to ensure that operational readiness and deployability of the Defence Forces are maintained to the greatest extent possible. These measures included barrack closures and the consolidation of three under-strength Army Brigades into two revised Army Brigades. This involved a re-deployment of personnel from HQ and administrative posts into front-line operational Units, which has improved the overarching capacity of the Defence Forces. I am satisfied that the White Paper on Defence sets out an appropriate blueprint for the development of the Defence Forces. There are currently no plans to re-deploy personnel in counties Cavan, Monaghan or the greater border region.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 51.

Air Corps

72. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the implementation of the Air Corps' improvement plan for health and safety at the Air Corps prem-

ises at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, in view of the fact that seven out of the eight phases of the plan were to be implemented by May 2017. [23970/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Deputy will be aware that during 2016 the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) conducted inspections at the Air Corps premises at Casement Aerodrome Baldonnell on three occasions, following which the HSA issued its Report of Inspection to the Air Corps. As recognized in this report, the Air Corps had already commenced activities of improvement and were proactive in implementing change before, during and after the engagement with the HSA.

In late 2016, the Air Corps wrote to the HSA outlining its proposed improvement plan and indicating that the Air Corps is fully committed to implementing the improved safety measures to ensure risks are as low as reasonably practicable.

This improvement plan is being conducted over eight phases. The military authorities have advised me that six of the eight phases have now been fully completed and a further phase is progressing well and will be completed shortly. The final phase is a continuous ongoing process.

Defence Forces Operations

73. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces performed aid to civil power duties at Shannon Airport on 25 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23971/17]

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

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

I can confirm that An Garda Síochána requested assistance from the Defence Forces at Shannon Airport on the 25 April 2017 and personnel were deployed to Shannon Airport on that date.

The issue of overflights by foreign military aircraft and the use of Shannon Airport by foreign military aircraft is the responsibility of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Successive Governments have made overflight and landing facilities available at Shannon Airport to the United States for well over 50 years. *Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 40.*

Defence Forces Remuneration

75. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to improve the pay, conditions and contracts of Defence Forces members following his meeting with a group (details supplied) in May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23973/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in each part of the Irish public sector have traditionally

been set by reference to levels of pay available in related public sector employments.

I believe that measures contained in the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) and the provisions introduced in Budget 2016 and 2017 will be of benefit generally to members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF). The provisions set out in the LRA are an extension of the provision of the Haddington Road Agreement and all existing dispute resolution procedures continue to apply.

The LRA provided for increased salaries during 2016 and 2017 in a manner which benefited the lower paid. These benefits come in the form of increases in gross pay in 2016 for those earning up to €31,000 and in 2017 for all those earning up to €65,000. In addition the Government has introduced legislation which has commenced the process to reduce the pay reduction applied under the FEMPI Acts.

In relation to the Pensions Related Deduction (PRD), which is commonly referred to as the 'Pension Levy', the exemption threshold for payment of the 'Levy' will increase substantially during the course of the agreement from €15,000 to €28,750 which means that annual income subject to the levy below €28,750 will no longer be liable to the deduction.

In terms of remuneration going forward, following the publication of the Pay Commission's report on 9 May 2017, the Government intends to initiate negotiations on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations. Future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will be dealt with within this process. I understand that both RACO and PDFORRA have been invited to the forthcoming discussions.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

76. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he met Prince Charles when he was visiting here. [23334/17]

The Taoiseach: I met with Prince Charles in Government Buildings last Friday as part of the three day visit by the Prince and his wife Camilla the Duchess of Cornwall to Ireland.

We discussed various aspects of the Prince's programme for the visit and the continued strength of the unique and important relationship between our two countries.

EU Meetings

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when the next EU Council meeting will take place. [23335/17]

The Taoiseach: The next European Council meeting is scheduled to take place on the 22nd and 23rd June 2017. This will include a regular meeting, as well as a meeting of the EU 27 Member States under the Article 50 format.

Written Questions Nos. 78 - 87

Departmental Expenditure

78. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23457/17]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach did not incur any expenditure on renting car park spaces for staff between 2011 and 2016 and to date in 2017.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

79. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23473/17]

The Taoiseach: Nothing has been spent by bodies or agencies under the aegis of my Department on renting car parking spaces for the periods in question.

Brexit Issues

80. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach if work has commenced on the paper on the economic challenges of Brexit as referenced in the programme for Government annual report 2017; the specific topics that will be covered in this paper; and the expected publication date of this paper. [23563/17]

The Taoiseach: At its meeting of 2 May, the Government welcomed the overall approach to and guidelines for the Brexit negotiations adopted by the European Council at its meeting on 29 April. The guidelines reflect Ireland's unique concerns - support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the peace process; avoid a hard border; and protect the Common Travel Area.

They also recognise the desirability of moving to discuss the future relationship between the EU and the UK once sufficient progress has been made on the withdrawal issues, as well as the likely need for transitional arrangements. Furthermore, the statement agreed by the European Council acknowledges that in the event of a united Ireland, brought about in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would legally be part of the EU.

This outcome is a major endorsement of Government's approach, and results from an intensive engagement with EU partners and institutions at all political and official levels in recent months.

Now that the overall approach to the negotiations has been set out by the EU, the Government has stated its intention to intensify its focus on the economic implications of Brexit, including on domestic policy measures to reinforce the competitiveness of the Irish economy, to protect it from potential negative impacts of Brexit and to pursue all possible opportunities that might arise.

To underpin this work, the Government will prepare a further paper on the economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the extensive work already underway across Departments, including sectoral analyses, and will reflect the core economic themes of my speech to the Institute of International and European Affairs of 15 February, including:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks,

not least from Brexit

- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helpful businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual Budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the review of Enterprise 2025; and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

In taking this important work forward, the Government will continue to engage with stakeholders, including through the All Island Civic Dialogue process.

Departmental Staff Data

81. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies. [23937/17]

82. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form. [23949/17]

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on. [23962/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 to 83, inclusive, together.

While there are no agency workers working in my Department, my Department is currently availing of a contract cleaning service as a temporary, emergency measure to ensure that service levels in my Department are maintained while a recruitment process for additional cleaning staff is undertaken.

There are no agency workers working in the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) - the only body under the aegis of my Department.

Neither my Department nor NESDO have contracted any consultants for work completed or investigations undertaken in HR and industrial relations.

Disability Activation Projects

84. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to specific businesses that place or recruit workers who have autism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23371/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government's Comprehensive Employment Strategy, which was launched by An Taoiseach in October 2015, provides a cross-government approach focusing on actions by different Departments and State agencies in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities. The purpose of the Strategy is to address the under-representation of people with disabilities in the labour force, and sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities, who are able to and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. Co-ordination of the Strategy's implementation is the responsibility of the Equality Division in the Department of Justice and Equality. The Strategy's six strategic priorities are:

- Build skills, capacity and independence
- Provide bridges and supports into work
- Make work pay
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work
- Provide coordinated and seamless support
- Engage employers

Given the complex cross-government nature of the strategy, an oversight implementation group was established under the independent chairmanship of Fergus Finlay. This group is tasked with monitoring the progress of the above six strategic priorities of the strategy, ensuring that each Government Department is fulfilling its obligations and meeting its targets. The Chair of the Group recently published the Annual Report, which highlighted areas where greater progress needs to be made, and which also included recommendations in relation to priorities for 2017.

The Strategy contains a range of practical measures to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Of particular relevance to people with autism are:

- The establishment of special public service competitions for people with disabilities and where appropriate, the provision of alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities into the public service. Discussions in relation to this commitment are underway between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Public Appointments Service.

- A national employer helpline, which was launched in January 2016, to provide expert guidance and peer support to employers in relation to the employment of staff with disabilities.

- An increase in the public sector employment quota from 3% to 6% on a phased basis to 2024, with work beginning on this later in the year.

The helpline was established by the employer bodies with support from the National Disability Authority and the Authority works with them to ensure greater awareness amongst and support for employers in employing people with disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum.

I might also mention the Action Plan on Autism, which the Department of Justice and Equality developed in conjunction with the National Disability Authority (NDA). The NDA monitors the implementation of the Plan and has initiated a number of actions relating to the Plan, including:

- Improving customer services for persons with disabilities with a specific focus on autism;

- Launching an online autism friendly public services training course;
- Providing training courses on autism friendly public services in connection with the autism advocacy and support organisation AsIAM to specific public services providers (e.g. An Garda Síochána, transport providers etc.);
- Updating and monitoring compliance with the statutory Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies, with a specific focus on autism.

The Department is responsible for several specific objectives contained in the Plan including:

- Raising disability awareness, including the dissemination of autism related materials;
- Engaging, supporting and providing guidance to people with autism who come in contact with the criminal justice system;
- Working with the NDA to review the impact of disability related policy and legislation.

Full implementation of the Action Plan on Autism is one of the actions contained in the new National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017- 2021, which it is expected will be published soon.

Garda Procedures

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of ministerial permissions her Department has given to members of An Garda Síochána to open bank accounts for official purposes in the past 20 years, in tabular form; the reason for the account opening and the year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23368/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy spans a large period of time and arrangements are in train in my Department to prepare a response. I will revert to the Deputy when the specific information is to hand.

Garda Procedures

86. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 40 of 15 November 2016, the number of those summonses not served in 2015 and 2016 that were re-issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23380/17]

87. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 40 of 15 November 2016 in which she stated that a summons struck out not served can be re-issued at the request of An Garda Síochána, if she will clarify same; if this is normal practice; the policies in place to enable a Garda to decide whether or not to have a summons re-issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23381/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 87 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.

Legal Aid Service Staff

88. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 16 of 30 March 2017, the number of new staff hires who are engaged in the provision of services in the area of international protection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23382/17]

89. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 16 of 30 March 2017, the position or title of each of the new 15 staff; the date that each of the new staff members' contracts began; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23383/17]

90. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 16 of 30 March 2017, if she has conducted her own inquiries and is satisfied that the extra funding given to the Legal Aid Board in December 2016 for international protection clients was used solely for positions relating to international protection staff commencing after the funds were provided and was used for new and additional positions and not for the replacement of pre-existing positions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23384/17]

91. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 16 of 30 March 2017, the oversight or auditing in place to ensure that funds provided to the Legal Aid Board for services to international protection applicants is ring-fenced and used only for that purpose; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23385/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 to 91, inclusive, together.

As I previously informed the Deputy I am informed by the Legal Aid Board that three of the board's law centres - Smithfield, Dublin 7; Seville House, Galway; and Popes Quay in Cork - are directly involved in protection cases and a number of additional staff have been assigned to those offices. Another office, the Refugee Documentation Centre, provides information services to all of the bodies involved in international protection cases. I am informed by the Legal Aid Board that the number of additional staff recruited to date and engaged in the provision of services in the area of International Protection is 13. As I stated in my response to the Deputy's Question of 30 March 2017, individual staff members can be involved in both international protection and other civil legal aid work. Some newly-recruited staff engaged in the provision of services in the area of international protection commenced employment during 2016; I understand that these staff were assigned in preparation for the commencement of the single application procedure. The Board continues to monitor staffing needs, capacity, and demand for services so that it can recruit and place staff, if necessary, where they will be most effective.

As previously stated, while the Board has staff that are specifically assigned to the area of international protection, it also provides legal services in relation to a range of important civil issues including, for example, legal services to parents whose children may be subject to care orders. While the Board is developing specialisation in its staff, it is also wishes to ensure flexibility in order to address areas of particular priority at a point in time. For that reason, some new staff engaged in the provision of services in the international protection area also have a wider civil element to their role.

The Board is committed to giving early legal advice to persons seeking international protec-

tion and to ensuring that those persons see a solicitor prior to their interview with the International Protection Office. I am further informed that the Board is currently finalising its model of service delivery and clarifying expectations regarding staff output, performance and value for money. When this process is finalised any further requirement will be considered but the Board is satisfied that the current demand for services is being met and there is no backlog of applicants waiting for international protection services. As is usual in such circumstances, the situation is being kept under active review. Finally, I can assure the Deputy that the Legal Aid Board is subject to a range of statutory and governance obligations including the 2016 *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*.

Details of the 13 staff members are set out in the following table.

Grade	Start Date
Legal Clerk	04/01/2016
Legal Clerk	11/01/2016
CO	18/01/2016
Solicitor	28/06/2016
CO	04/07/2016
EO	19/09/2016
EO	01/11/2016
CO	02/01/2017
HEO	13/01/2017
Legal Clerk	23/01/2017
CO	30/01/2017
CO	06/02/2017
CO	06/02/2017

Departmental Expenditure

92. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent by her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23454/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In respect of my Department, office accommodation at Montague Court is rented under lease agreement where 25 car parking spaces are included, and where the individual cost of car parking is not specified in the lease agreement. All other property and associated parking occupied by my department is provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

93. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23470/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being collated. I will contact the Deputy directly when this is to hand.

Garda Code of Ethics

94. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if guidelines exist governing the behaviour of undercover police officers operating within non-violent campaign groups; and if training is given to such undercover officers with regard to their human rights obligations while working undercover within such groups. [23488/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that neither I nor my Department would be directly involved in arrangements for or the conduct of day-to-day policing activities, including the conduct of intelligence-gathering operations, whether overt or undercover.

The policing powers and duties of members of An Garda Síochána are set out in the Garda Síochána Acts 2005-2015, including that the direction and control of An Garda Síochána are matters for the Garda Commissioner. Members of An Garda Síochána are subject not just to the provisions of the Garda Síochána Acts but to the law generally and also to the Garda codes and regulations in carrying out their duties, including the Code of Ethics published by the Policing Authority in January.

Garda Expenditure

95. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the establishment of the horse-mounted unit in An Garda Síochána; the annual running costs of this unit; and the number of persons deployed and the purpose of same. [23489/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and, as Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I am, however, advised by the Garda Authorities that there are currently 13 horses attached to the Garda Mounted Unit, which is staffed by 1 Sergeant, 13 Gardaí and 2 grooms.

The Unit performs patrols primarily in the Dublin Metropolitan Region on a daily basis but, subject to other operational requirements, can be deployed to facilitate requests from local Garda management and outside agencies nationally. The Unit provides assistance in a variety of policing operations such as crime prevention and detection, operational patrols, backup to other Garda units, ceremonial events and maintaining order at public events.

The total gross expenditure for the Garda Mounted Unit for the years 2002-2016 is outlined in the following table.

Year	Total
2002	€116,791
2003	€211,267
2004	€1,240,140
2005	€1,159,613
2006	€1,192,645
2007	€1,153,123
2008	€1,385,033
2009	€1,451,639

Year	Total
2010	€1,144,529
2011	€1,178,183
2012	€1,081,767
2013	€1,139,560
2014	€992,621
2015	€920,351
2016	€1,066,858

Courts Service Data

96. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 4 April 2017, the number of those fines imposed that specifically relate to smuggling or selling illicit cigarettes, fuel and alcohol; the number of attachment orders imposed; the number of persons sent to prison for non-payment; and the number of those fines paid. [23490/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested reports from the Courts Service in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's question and I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as all of the relevant information is to hand.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

97. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of her Department through agencies in the public sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23934/17]

98. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the persons employed through agencies in her Department in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23947/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department and the Agencies under its remit use the services of the State's independent recruitment office, the Public Appointments Service, to the maximum extent possible.

However, in order to deliver the business of the organisation, it is occasionally necessary for my Department and its Agencies to engage the services of external recruitment or employment agencies. The following table contain the relevant details as of 17 May 2017.

Name of Recruitment Agency	Services Provided
Eir	Receptionist Services in the Probation Service - 3 persons
CPL Healthcare Recruitment	Employment of 31 Nurses, 7 Chaplains, and 4 Psychologists for the Irish Prison Service

Name of Recruitment Agency	Services Provided
Locumotion Recruitment	Employment of 12 Locum Doctors (including weekend cover) for the Irish Prison Service

Consultancy Contracts Data

99. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23959/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The total monetary value of work contracted out to external agencies and consultants from my Department and agencies under my aegis from January 2016 to date is as follows:

Services Provided	Fees
Workplace Investigations	€ 81,318
Recruitment Services	€ 84,304
Legal Services	€ 38,423
Total	€204,045

The Deputy may also wish to note that from time to time my Department and agencies under my aegis would engage interview board members directly who would be paid a daily rate in line with relevant DPER guidelines.

Revenue Commissioners Powers

100. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are legally entitled to take a portion of a person's social welfare payment if they have outstanding debt and tax liabilities; the procedure by which this can be done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23394/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 1002 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the use of Attachment Orders by Revenue in situations where a taxpayer or business fails to meet statutory tax payment obligations and opts not to engage in identifying and agreeing a mutually acceptable solution. I am advised by Revenue that its clear preference is always to work with taxpayers experiencing cash-flow difficulties and where possible agree mutually acceptable payment solutions.

Revenue has confirmed that it only uses its Attachment powers in the more egregious cases and where standard enforcement options such as Sheriff or external solicitor fail to secure collection. Where Revenue serves an Attachment Order on a financial institution or relevant third party it also forwards a copy of the notice to the taxpayer so that there is full awareness of the seriousness of the situation.

Revenue advises me that it does not serve attachment orders on the Department of Social Protection in respect of payments from that Department in respect of any pension or benefit payments payable to a recipient. However, when attachment orders are served on a Bank or other institution, Revenue will not be aware of the source of any funds in any such account.

Revenue is always conscious of the challenges that can exist for some taxpayers or businesses in meeting their tax obligations in a timely manner due to cash flow difficulties. Revenue caseworkers work with people in such situations in an effort to agree mutually acceptable payment solutions in preference to deploying debt collection/enforcement sanctions, including Attachment Orders. Where Revenue is informed of DSP payments during the engagement process this helps to inform an agreed solution.

I understand the Deputy may be referring to a particular case, and, if so, I would urge him to encourage the person concerned to make early contact with Revenue so that a solution can be put in place as quickly as possible. In this respect the person concerned should make direct contact with Mr. Leonard Burke, Principal Officer in the Collector-General's Office telephone 061-488551.

Tax Code

101. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered increasing the standard rate tax band from €33,800, based on personal circumstances of a single, widowed or a surviving civil partner, to €36,900 with a similar increase for all other personal circumstances; if he will provide a costing of same in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23419/17]

102. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered introducing an additional tax band for income levels between €33,800 and €36,900 taxable at 33% based on personal circumstances of a single, widowed or a surviving civil partner without qualifying children with a similar band for all other personal circumstances; if he will provide a costing of same in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23420/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

The Deputy may wish to note that a Post-Budget 2017 Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html>.

In relation to the first question, this Ready Reckoner shows a wide range of detailed information, including the estimated cost or yield to the Exchequer of widening the standard tax rate bands. While the Ready Reckoner does not show all of the specific costings requested by the Deputy, other changes can be estimated on a pro-rata basis with those displayed in the Reckoner.

In relation to the second question, I am informed by Revenue that the first and full year cost of introducing an additional tax band in the manner outlined by the Deputy is estimated to be in the order of €165 million and €191 million respectively.

These figures and all figures provided in the Ready Reckoner are estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2014, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are estimated by reference to projected 2017 incomes. They are provisional and may be revised.

As the Deputy will be aware, in the Programme for Partnership Government there is a commitment to ask the Oireachtas to continue to phase out the Universal Social Charge (USC) as part of a wider medium-term income tax reform plan that keeps the tax base broad, reduces excessive tax rates for middle income earners, and limits the benefit for high earners. The Programme for Government therefore includes a commitment not to index tax credits or rate bands.

Indexation of the income tax standard-rate bands would benefit only those currently paying income tax at the higher rate – i.e. single individuals earning over €33,800 and single-income married couples earning over €42,800. It is estimated that in 2017, 21% of taxpayer units will pay income tax at the higher rate. Indexation of the standard rate bands would therefore be of benefit to only 21% of taxpayers.

I have long said that the burden of the income tax system in Ireland is too high and that I would seek to reduce it as soon as it was prudent to do so. Budget 2017 has, for the third year in succession, introduced reductions in the income tax burden for all those within the scope of USC with the three lowest rates of USC having been reduced over these years from 2%, 4% and 7% to 0.5%, 2.5% and 5% respectively. This is important progress in making work pay and supporting individuals returning to and remaining in employment.

In this regard the Income Tax Reform Plan developed for consultation with the Oireachtas, published in July last year, may be of interest, and is available at the following link: http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Income%20Tax%20Reform%20Plan-FINAL_0.pdf

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

103. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23466/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy, I am advised that of the 18 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 8 have incurred costs relating to the rental of car park spaces for the period in question. I have included the details of payments made in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in the following table in respect of these 8 bodies, as requested.

Of the remaining 10 bodies, the Office of Public Works provides a service to the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Tax Appeals Commission in relation to provision of car park facilities. The remaining 8 bodies under the aegis of my Department have not incurred any car parking space costs.

Body	The amount spent on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.	
Central Bank	Year	Cost
	2011	€185,000
	2012	€185,000
	2013	€185,000
	2014	€185,000
	2015	€185,000
	2016	€185,000
	2017	€ 46,000
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	Effective from March of 2014, ReBo has operated within a sub-lease from the Law Reform Commission. Quarterly amounts payable within that sub-lease include access to car parking facilities. No breakdown of costs available.	

Body	The amount spent on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.	
Central Bank	Year	Cost
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	Year	Cost
	2011	€4,918
	2012	€3,750
	2013	€5,000
	2014	€5,000
	2015	€5,000
	2016	€5,000
	2017	€1,667
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	Year	Cost
	2013	€82,134.07
	2014	€89,600.80
	2015	€81,759.73
	2016	€46,045.81
	2017	€0
	Note:I am advised that it would be a significant and costly exercise for the Special Liquidators to undertake compiling this information for the period prior to their appointment given the information is not readily available and the compilation of this information would be an entirely manual process.	
National Treasury Management Agency	Year	Cost
	2011	€125,546
	2012	€89,120
	2013	€63,290
	2014	€63,290
	2015	€65,927
	2016	€99,133
	2017	€16,407 (up to 30 April 2017)
National Asset Management Agency	* -The National Asset Management Agency were recharged a portion of the NTMA fees for 2011-2016 inclusive.	
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	* -The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has been recharged a portion of the NTMA fees since its inception in 2014.	
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Year	Cost
	2011	€18,000
	2012	€18,000
	2013	€18,000
	2014	€18,000
	2015	€18,000

Body	The amount spent on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.	
Central Bank	Year	Cost
	2016	€18,240
	2017	€9,480 (payments made to date)

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

104. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the restrictions, rules or regulations for regulated financial institutions in making telephone contact with mortgage holders in arrears; the number of times per day, week or month they can ring a mortgage holder; the sanctions for financial institutions that break these rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23579/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (CCMA) sets out how mortgage lenders must treat borrowers in or facing mortgage arrears. The CCMA applies to the mortgage loan of a borrower which is secured by his/her primary residence. The CCMA provides that a lender must ensure that it has in place a Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) as a framework for handling cases. The first step in the MARP process is communication with the borrower.

Under the CCMA, a lender is required to produce and implement a policy, approved by the board of directors, regarding communications with borrowers. Further the CCMA provides that a lender must ensure that the level of communications from the lender, or any third party acting on its behalf, is proportionate and not excessive, taking into account the circumstances of the borrowers, including that unnecessarily frequent communications are not made. The lender must also ensure that communications with borrowers are not aggressive, intimidating or harassing and that borrowers are given sufficient time to complete an action they have committed to before follow up communication is attempted. Steps must also be taken to agree future communication with borrowers. A lender must maintain records of all communications with borrowers in mortgage arrears or in pre arrears.

For mortgages in arrears that do not fall within the scope of the CCMA, lenders are required to comply with the arrears handling provisions of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 ('the Code'). The relevant provisions as regards 'Arrears Handling' are contained in Chapter 10 of the Code. The Code provides that a regulated entity must ensure that the level of contact and communications with a personal consumer in arrears is proportionate and not excessive. Each calendar month, no more than three unsolicited communications to a personal consumer in respect of arrears, by whatever means, can be initiated. This does not include any communication that has been requested by, or agreed in advance with, the personal consumer; and any communication to the personal consumer the sole purpose of which is to comply with the requirements of the Code or other regulatory requirements.

If a consumer is not satisfied with how a regulated entity is dealing with him/her, or believes that the regulated entity is not following the requirements of the Central Bank codes and regulations, the consumer should firstly make a complaint to the regulated entity. Under the Consumer Protection Code (Provisions 10.7 to 10.12), regulated entities must have a complaints procedure in place and must handle complaints speedily, efficiently and fairly. If a consumer is not happy with the response he/she receives from the regulated entity they can, provided the conduct complained of occurred within the last six years, escalate their complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO). The FSO has the statutory powers to investigate complaints

against financial services providers.

I am informed by the Central Bank that it has a wide range of tools at its disposal to investigate and take action against regulated entities and/or individuals which fall short of its' expected standards of behaviour, up to and including, where appropriate, administrative sanctions (which can include fines and other penalties) under Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942 in the case of a contravention of the above requirements.

Tax Rebates

105. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a tax refund for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23583/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a refund of tax for 2016 was made by direct credit to the nominated bank account of the authorised agent of the person concerned on 16 February, 2017.

Brexit Issues

106. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his Department is assessing options on border control other than a hard border; and the measures which will be required between Northern Ireland and here, in view of the repeated statements from Prime Minister May regarding leaving the customs union and the response from the EU confirming that this will require a type of border. [16716/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government has published a comprehensive document on 'Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union' on 2 May.

The Government's position in relation to the Border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear - continued freedom of movement, absence of a hard border, and minimal impact on business and trade are key objectives. Clearly in this regard the closer the trading relationship between the UK and EU is more generally the better.

I would point out that the guidelines for the EU 27 Article 50 negotiation framework, agreed by the Heads of State and Government on 29 April, specifically refer to the need to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Peace Process.

In this regard the guidelines recognise the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, outlining the need for flexible and imaginative solutions, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border, while respecting the integrity of the Union's legal order.

The Government has welcomed the EU's negotiating guidelines as reflecting Ireland's unique concerns and priorities. They express the EU's continued support for the Peace Process and the need to protect the Good Friday Agreement. They acknowledge the need for flexible and imaginative solutions to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. They agree to the recognition of existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the UK and Ireland, which are compatible with EU law, such as the Common Travel Area.

Ireland has also secured the agreement of its EU counterparts on the need to recognise the unique constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the need to ensure that – should a united

Ireland be brought about in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement – the entire territory of such a united Ireland would be part of the European Union.

This is a positive outcome, showing that the Government's extensive political, diplomatic and official campaign of recent months has been effective in ensuring understanding and recognition of our unique circumstances and specific issues.

Like all Government agencies, the Revenue Commissioners are actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's objectives. The precise arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations which will now take place between the EU and UK.

Banking Sector Regulation

107. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fines imposed on a bank (details supplied) for breaches of money laundering rules. [20724/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, I, as Minister for Finance, have no function in the relationship between the Irish banks and their regulator, the Central Bank of Ireland. The Central Bank is the statutory supervisory and enforcement authority for regulated financial services providers in Ireland, and it is also responsible for protecting the consumer of financial services. As such, it is the independent responsibility of the Central Bank to ensure that financial institutions and individuals are held accountable for their compliance with anti-money laundering ("AML") and countering the financing of terrorism ("CFT") preventative obligations set out in Criminal Justice Act 2010 (CJA 2010).

I am advised by the Central Bank that its recent investigation into designated persons' compliance with AML and CFT preventative obligations was conducted under the Central Bank's Administrative Sanctions Procedure (ASP) as per Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942.

One of the relevant AML/CFT breaches for an ASP case can be a breach of section 42 of the CJA 2010, which requires designated persons to submit a suspicious transaction report ("STR") to An Garda Síochána and to the Revenue Commissioners "as soon as practicable". Designated persons are obliged to submit STRs where a suspicion or knowledge of money laundering or terrorist financing arises during the course of business.

For the purpose of clarification, an investigation under ASP is not a criminal investigation. The Central Bank's supervisory remit is to monitor credit and financial institutions for compliance with AML/CFT control measures. It has not a statutory remit to investigate or prosecute substantive money laundering or terrorist financing offences. Any fine that is imposed for AML/CFT breaches by the Central Bank under ASP relates to control breaches and not to actual money laundering or terrorist financing offences.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

108. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23931/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the Deputy is referring to persons employed by bodies under the aegis of my Department through recruitment agencies.

I have been advised that of the 18 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 7* bodies have persons employed through agencies. I have included the number of persons in the following table in respect of these 7 bodies, as requested.

Of the remaining 11 bodies, I am advised that none have persons employed through agencies.

Body	The number of persons that are employed under the aegis of his department through agencies in the public sector
C&AGs	15
Central Bank	13
National Treasury Management Agency	11*
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	3
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	13

* The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) assigns staff to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). This figure relates to temporary staff working in the NTMA who are employed through agencies.

Departmental Staff Data

109. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23944/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are no persons employed through agencies in my Department. There are 12 persons employed in the Shareholding and Financial Advisory Division of my Department who are seconded from the NTMA.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

110. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23957/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy, the information which I am providing is in respect of costs incurred to date in 2017. I have been advised that of the 18 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 6* have incurred costs for contracted work completed by external agencies or consultants in human resources and industrial relations. I have included the details of payments made to date in 2017 in the following table in respect of these 4 bodies, as requested.

Of the remaining 14 bodies, I have been advised that they have not incurred any applicable costs.

Body	The monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his/her Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	€2, 033
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	€3,064
National Treasury Management Agency	€41,951*
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	€2,685

* The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) assigns staff to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and also provides them with business and support services and systems. The costs incurred relate directly to psychometric assessment and medical assessment as required under the NTMA recruitment and selection process and include VAT where applicable.

Special Educational Needs

111. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a place in a preschool pending receipt of a diagnostic report from the early intervention team; when the school will be provided with written confirmation of diagnosis from the early intervention team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23410/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): ASD Early intervention classes are available for children aged 3-5 with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Early intervention classes are intended to provide early support for children with ASD before they start school. Following early intervention children will attend a mainstream class unless there is professional guidance that they require a special class or a placement in a special school.

In order to access an early intervention class children over 4 years of age (who will not reach the age of 6 during the school year) must have an ASD diagnosis and a recommendation from a relevant professional for an early intervention placement.

The availability and provision of health-related services is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), and matters in relation to the provision of such services should be directed to the Minister for Health through the Health Service Executive. My Department has no responsibility for such services.

State Examinations Data

112. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondary schools by county that will roll out the junior certificate schools programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23372/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is particularly targeted at junior cycle (lower secondary) students who are identified as being at risk of early school leaving, perhaps without completing the Ju-

nior Certificate.

The breakdown of schools offering the JCSP, by county, for the 2016/2017 school year is in the following table. There are a small number of special schools that also offer the programme. Finalised figures for special schools for 2016 are not yet available.

County	Schools Offering JCSP in 2016
Carlow	3
Cavan	2
Clare	3
Cork	22
Donegal	14
Dublin	55
Galway	12
Kerry	5
Kildare	5
Kilkenny	3
Laois	2
Leitrim	1
Limerick	8
Longford	4
Louth	5
Mayo	7
Meath	5
Monaghan	5
Offaly	4
Sligo	4
Tipperary	8
Waterford	7
Westmeath	3
Wexford	9
Wicklow	4

State Examinations Data

113. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondary schools by county that will roll out the leaving certificate applied programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23373/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their student. The LCA is a two-year programme designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes.

Breakdown by county offering Leaving Cert Applies in 2016/2017 is as follows:-

County	Number of Schools Offering LCA
Carlow	2
Cavan	6
Clare	7
Cork	31
Donegal	18
Dublin	67
Galway	10
Kerry	12
Kildare	14
Kilkenny	3
Laois	3
Leitrim	1
Limerick	14
Longford	1
Louth	12
Mayo	11
Meath	12
Monaghan	6
Offaly	9
Roscommon	1
Sligo	6
Tipperary	14
Waterford	9
Westmeath	2
Wexford	9
Wicklow	7

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme therefore it is not possible to predict the exact number of schools that will offer the LCA in 2017/2018.

National Educational Psychological Service

114. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, is available for students throughout the summer months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23374/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to inter-

vene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

THE NEPS services to pupil set out above are moderated through the school and delivered on school premises and during normal school opening period and so would not, save in the most exceptional of circumstances, be conducted during the summer school closure.

Should any parent or guardian have concerns as to the educational, social or emotional development of their child they should, in the first instance, raise these concerns with the Principal of the school concerned with a view to his/her discussing the matter with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local NEPS office.

I can inform the Deputy that NEPS psychologists provide direct advice and assistance to schools experiencing a critical incident or traumatic event and attend on-site at the school, when invited to do so by school authorities, throughout the year as events dictate, including during school closure periods.

School Accommodation Provision

115. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will receive a decision on an application for additional accommodation of eight prefab classrooms. [23378/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in the 6 Year Construction Programme. In that regard, my Department is in receipt of an application from the school for temporary accommodation to address its interim accommodation needs. The application is currently under consideration and a decision will be conveyed to the school authorities shortly.

Special Educational Needs Staff

116. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will prioritise special needs assistant, SNA, applications from newly established schools announced in May 2017; and if he will ensure adequate SNA support is in place when they open in September 2017 in view of the fact the announcement came one month after the deadline for SNA applications by schools. [23379/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these

care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE. All schools have the contact details of their local SENO. Contact details are also available on the NCSE website. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

All schools, including newly established schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year by 6th April 2017. The NCSE will continue to process applications for access to SNA support which are received after the April deadline. Such applications will be processed in the order in which the applications are received. Schools will be advised of their SNA allocations for the 2016/17 school year, prior to the end of the current school year.

Once allocated, the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are then matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management. 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. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Where a school wish to appeal the SNA support allocation which has been made to them, they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

School Admissions

117. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23402/17]

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. The written consultation process which closed recently attracted almost 1,000 responses from a combination of individuals, schools and stakeholder organisations.

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. I advised that following the receipt and analysis of written submissions, consideration would be given as to whether any additional steps are needed as part of the consultation process. Accordingly, on Monday 15 May I announced that I will hold a Forum on the role of Religion in Primary School Admissions on Monday 29th May 2017.

My aim is to find a solution which addresses the issues in this area, while respecting the strongly-held and legitimate desire of minority religious groups to run schools which are genuinely of their own ethos.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

118. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are guidelines in place relating to the use of quiet rooms for children with autism in schools; if his Department monitors the use of such rooms; if training is provided to teachers in the use of quiet rooms and the circumstances in which they can be used; if his Department has received complaints about improper use of quiet rooms; if so, the number of complaints received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23412/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The well-being and safety of children should be at the centre of all policy and practices in schools.

All schools must have a child protection policy that adheres to certain key principles of best practice in child protection and welfare and all schools are required to formally adopt and implement, the Department's 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools' as part of their overall child protection policy.

The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all of the pupils in their school and is required to prepare a code of behaviour in accordance with Section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Section 23 (4) of the Act states that the Principal of a recognised school shall, before registering a child as a student at that school, provide the parents of such child with a copy of the school's code of behaviour.

Schools may seek advice from their local National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, from their NCSE Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), or from the National Behavioural Support Services, as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in school.

Many schools withdraw pupils occasionally from the main classroom for short periods of time in order to provide support to them, or to manage pupil behaviour, if a child is exhibiting behaviours which may be a danger to themselves or others.

In some circumstances, a child who is exhibiting extreme behaviours may be brought to another room to ensure the safety of other pupils and until they are calm again. Schools should supervise and support children who leave the classroom until they have recovered and are able to re-engage in the classroom.

Where used, it will normally form part of a school's response to behaviour and part of student support structures, procedures and practices.

The withdrawal of a child from the classroom in order to deal individually with the child

does not require the authorisation of the Department of Education and Skills. It is a matter for the school authorities, the child and the parents or guardians of the child concerned.

Some schools also have multi-sensory rooms that provide a variety of sensory stimuli and which are designed to provide sensory stimulation for pupils with special educational needs, in spaces which are designed to encourage positive actions and responses for pupils with sensory impairment. They can also be used for pupils to use interactive equipment towards specific educational aims.

My Department, through the Special Education Support Service (SESS), provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers working with students with special educational needs, including training for teachers in the area of challenging behaviour and Autism. My Department is also currently examining the issue of developing guidelines for schools on the specific issue of restraint or intervention.

Where a parent, or any other person, has concerns about the care or safety of a child in school they should report these concerns to the Board of Management of the school in the first instance.

Where a parent or other person has a concern about the welfare or protection of a child in a school they may report the matter as a child protection concern to Tusla or to the Department of Education and Skills who will then report any child protection complaint in accordance with the Department's procedures.

The NCSE has published updated policy advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research.

The report includes 11 key Recommendations which focus on improvements which might be considered to the range of provisions which are currently available for children with Autism in schools. The report includes recommendations in relation to Crisis Situations. The report is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and external representatives to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered and that a timetable for implementation is prepared. The work of the Implementation Group is ongoing.

My Department is aware of some complaints and general queries concerning the use of quiet or withdrawal facilities in certain schools. When such issues are raised with officials of my Department the complainants are referred in the first instance to the school principal or the school's Board of Management.

Public Sector Pay

119. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a union (details supplied) will be invited to participate in the upcoming talks on public sector pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23413/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding

of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation.

Teacher Redeployment

120. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if no teacher who is a member of a union (details supplied) will be made redundant under the redeployment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23414/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teacher Allocations Section of my Department contacted 60 second-level schools in early January regarding a potential surplus staffing situation that may occur in the 2017/18 school year. The school management of these schools have provided information regarding anticipated staff changes (i.e. retirements, resignations, career breaks, job-sharing etc.) for the 2017/2018 school year.

Based on the information provided, there are no second-level schools in the position of having to nominate surplus teachers for compulsory redeployment.

School Transport Provision

121. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide alternative school transport arrangements for a person (details supplied) with special educational needs in order to address the concerns of their parents. [23415/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme for Children for Special Educational Needs is to, having regard to available resources, support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service.

Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme, is obliged to tender all works, goods and services in line with European Directives on public procurement. The tender process must be fair and equal to all applicants and although a new contractor may mean changes in arrangements for some children, Bus Éireann do not have the discretion to favour one contractor over another.

An individual school transport service with an escort was sanctioned for the child in question. All nominated school transport drivers and escorts are subject to vetting procedures conducted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit.

School Accommodation

122. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school

(details supplied) has not been granted funding to provide additional classroom accommodation in view of the fact it was allocated an additional classroom teacher; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the current multi-purpose room is not suitable for classroom accommodation in view of the fact it has no toilet facilities and is currently being utilised as a multi-sensory room for children with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23416/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places in an area. The area in which the school referred to by the Deputy is located has not been identified as an area of demographic growth. It is considered that there are sufficient primary school places in the catchment area to meet pupil demand and, in that context, the application for additional accommodation was not approved. In this regard my Department considers that the position can be examined further when the enrolment position in the area in which the school is located is confirmed after September 2017.

In that context, my Department suggested that the school use available accommodation, such as the multi-purpose room, to meet the immediate accommodation requirement. While it is understood this room may be used as a sensory room it is noted that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has not approved a special education class, therefore accommodation for a sensory room would not be provided.

School Transport Eligibility

123. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) is eligible for the school transport scheme for the remainder of the junior cycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23422/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of this Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The change of family address means that the child, referred to by the Deputy, is no longer attending his nearest Post Primary School and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge.

The family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office in Waterford if they wish to get more information on the availability of transport on a concessionary basis, phone number 051-

873401.

National Educational Psychological Service

124. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23424/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the the Deputy will be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

If the parents of the child, the subject of this question, have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise, in the first instance, that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to his/her raising these concerns with the local NEPS Local Office in Naas.

National Educational Psychological Service

125. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of psychological assessments which have been undertaken by each NEPS service in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23426/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases receive assessment services through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have a student assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS

has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment. This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I attach for the Deputy's information a count by calendar year of the number of individual pupils referred to NEPS psychologists in schools nationally. Statistics for 2016 are incomplete as cases undertaken in the 2016/17 academic may not be informed to the NEPS Casetrack database until next summer. The count in 2017 represents referral put on that database to date and are also incomplete.

NEPS psychologists in addition to support of individual pupils outlined in the above referral process provide a range of systemic support and development services to schools including teacher training, organisational / process development and advice, and direct assistance where requested, in the event of a critical incident affecting the school community.

Number by Year of Student Referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists nationally

Calendar Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 (**)	2017(*)
Number	8,840	8,516	8,075	8,715	6,809	1,824

(*) Year to date and incomplete as yet (see note below)

(**) Not complete as some cases are informed to the Casetrack database over the summer months following the academic year 2016/17

National Educational Psychological Service

126. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of psychological assessments which have been undertaken by the NEPS service in County Louth in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23427/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases receive assessment services through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have a student assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring.

Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment. This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I attach for the Deputy's information a count by calendar year of the number of individual pupils referred to NEPS psychologists in schools in Co. Louth. Statistics for 2016 are incomplete as cases undertaken in the 2016/17 academic may not be informed to the NEPS Casetrack database until next summer. The count in 2017 represents referral put on that database to date and are also incomplete.

NEPS psychologists in addition to support of individual pupils outlined in the above referral process provide a range of systemic support and development services to schools including teacher training, organisational / process development and advice, and direct assistance where requested, in the event of a critical incident effecting the school community.

Number by Year of Student Referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists in Co. Louth

Calendar Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 (**)	2017(*)
Number	201	248	182	235	147	30

(*) Year to date and incomplete as yet (see note below)

(**) Not complete as some cases are informed to the Casetrack database over the summer months following the academic year 2016/17

Psychological Assessments

127. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of psychological assessments which have been undertaken by each SCPA service in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23428/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases receive assessment services through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have a student assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. SCPA is utilised, in the main, where as yet unfilled vacancies exist in NEPS staffing provision locally due to resignation or retirement, etc. or where staffing resource is lost temporarily through extended leave (maternity, sick or carer's leave).

I might add that all schools are able to access full NEP supports in the event of a critical incident irrespective of their having ongoing access to an assigned NEPS psychologist or not.

I attach for the Deputy's information a count by calendar year of the number of SCPA assessments paid for by my Department to schools countrywide.

Number by Year of Educational Psychological Assessments paid for by NEPS under the SCPA scheme for Schools nationally

Calendar Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017(*)
Number of SCPA Assessments	2,031	2,063	1,634	1,726	2,151	1,185

(*) Year to date

Psychological Assessments

128. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of psychological assessments which have been undertaken by the SCPA service in County Louth in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23429/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases receive assessment services through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have a student assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. SCPA is utilised, in the main, where as yet unfilled vacancies exist in NEPS staffing provision locally due to resignation or retirement, etc. or where staffing resource is lost temporarily through extended leave (maternity, sick or carer's leave).

I might add that all schools are able to access full NEP supports in the event of a critical incident irrespective of their having ongoing access to an assigned NEPS psychologist or not.

I attach for the Deputy's information a count by calendar year of the number of SCPA assessments paid for by my Department to schools in County Louth.

Number by Year of Educational Psychological Assessments paid for by NEPS under the SCPA scheme for Schools in Co. Louth

Calendar Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017(*)
Number of SCPA Assessments	129	54	49	142	102	110

(*) Year to date

Departmental Expenditure

129. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23448/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For the Deputy's information, the Office of Public Works provide the premises and ancillary facilities used as Department's offices. In some cases, car parking is provided as part of these arrangements. The Department also contracts car parking facilities directly in a small number of locations as the staff require their cars for official purposes and must transfer significant materials that are confidential and contain personal data. The following table lists, by year, expenditure from my Department's budget on renting car park spaces.

Year	Total rental paid
2011	€9,436.00
2012	€9,408.00
2013	€8,346.90
2014	€10,570.10
2015	€18,455.97
2016	€20,322.96
2017	€12,953.99

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

130. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23464/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy in regard to state bodies under the aegis of my Department is not routinely collated by my Department.

Officials are making enquiries with its aegis bodies and will supply the information sought by the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

131. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when building works will commence on a school (details supplied) in Drumcondra. [23491/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is to provide a new 350 student post primary school with an MDVI (Multiple Disability and Visual Impairment) unit, at the site of existing school building.

Planning Permission for this new school was lodged with Dublin City Council at the end of January 2017. A decision is currently awaited from Dublin City Council on this application.

Once planning permission is received and reviewed, my Department will then be in contact with the school authorities as regards the further progression of this project.

School Costs

132. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to indicate the number of schools that will be implementing his proposals for cutting back on school costs as

per circular 0032/2017; the number that will defer its implementation until September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23496/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My ambition is to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe within a decade.

To deliver on my ambition to be the best we have to improve information and complaint procedures for parents and students, particularly in relation to costs.

I want to give parents a strong voice in ensuring costs are always kept to a minimum.

I believe that we have to put a greater emphasis on reducing the cost of school uniforms and other costs.

Schools have to do everything possible to keep costs down for parents, including the use of generic items, sew on or iron on crests, and making sure that various elements of the uniform can be purchased in multiple stores.

In the Action Plan for Education I have committed to the restoration of capitation payments. In restoring capitation payments, where schools have introduced these cost effective principles, they will receive a premium capitation payment.

I believe that full transparency in relation to the use of any voluntary contributions is important information for parents to have. The Parent and Student Charter will require every school to set out a financial statement, which will include information on how any voluntary contributions are used.

This is part of a suite of measures I am introducing, including the School Admissions Bill which will reform information and procedures around the process of school enrolment, and the commencement of Fitness to Teach, which allow a complaint to be made about a registered teacher to the Teaching to Council for the first time.

Circular letter 32/2017 'Measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs' was published at the end of April and is available on my Departments website.

Following the implementation of the circular, school authorities will be required to adopt the following principles of cost-effective practice which will put a greater emphasis on reducing the cost of school uniforms and other costs:

- All elements of a school uniform should be purchasable from various stores;
- Only iron on or sew on crests should be used;
- Wherever possible, generic rather than branded items should be specified (e.g. uniform, clothing, IT tablets, sports equipment etc.);
- Provide parents with a list of all required items and indicate the likely costs of these required items at best value stores;
- Provide a book rental scheme;
- Phase out, between now and September 2018, the use of workbooks which cannot be re-used;
- Where an exclusive supply arrangement applies, it should be tendered for regularly and

- The Board of Management in each school will have to review the cost of items which they require parents to purchase and to make this information available to the school community.

Schools will consult with parents on their views and ask for suggestions on cost reduction initiatives. Parents will be asked for their views about school uniform costs, and other costs, through a questionnaire.

The Circular does recognise that schools may already have made arrangements for the coming school year. Where this is the position, Schools should implement this Circular from September 2017 onwards.

For example, in relation to school uniforms, schools may already have made arrangements for September 2017. These schools can begin to engage with parents regarding the school uniform policy and other costs for September 2018. It is anticipated that this engagement could begin from September 2017. In relation to when schools will adopt the principles of cost-effective practice, my Department has not gathered information on the number of schools who intend to adopt the principles immediately and those schools who have already made arrangements for the coming school year and therefore intend to adopt the principles from September 2017 onwards.

When budgetary resources are available to provide a premium capitation payment for schools, the Department will then consider the most appropriate mechanism to gather evidence on whether or not schools have adopted the principles of cost-effective practice.

School Enrolments

133. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an assurance will be given to parents of children in a school's (details supplied) catchment area who have not secured a place in 2017 to the effect they will be accommodated in another school in September 2018. [23548/17]

134. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to aid a school (details supplied) to facilitate an extra class for the school year in September 2017. [23549/17]

135. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to aid a school (details supplied) to secure an extra class for the school year beginning in September 2017. [23550/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 to 135, inclusive, together.

My Department is aware that there have been some enrolment issues in the area referred to by the Deputy, for September 2017. In that context my Department is in ongoing direct contact with primary schools in the area in respect of their junior infant capacity.

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

In respect of the schools referred to by the Deputy, my Department is in ongoing communication with the Patron regarding the level of junior infant intake in September 2017. My Department can confirm that assurances have been given to parents, by the school in question,

that, should they not secure a school place for September 2017, that they will be offered a junior infant place for September 2018.

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

School Enrolments

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to address the supply of national schools for the River Valley catchment area in Swords in view of the increases in the local population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23551/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is aware that there have been some enrolment issues in the Swords school planning area for September 2017. In that context my Department is in ongoing direct contact with primary schools in the area in respect of their junior infant capacity.

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

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

Teachers' Remuneration

137. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding unequal pay for teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23562/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. A previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the Government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO in September 2016 will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4,600 and €6,700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours. The

pay increases for new teachers were also available to ASTI members under the proposals which members recently balloted on.

The agreements have restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and for apprenticeships.

It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all areas of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €85 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

Further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay across the public service will be informed by the recently published analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission.

The Government established the Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of future public service pay talks. Indeed, negotiations on a successor agreement to Lansdowne Road will shortly get under way.

School Accommodation Provision

138. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position regarding an application for a required extension to a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; the progress to date with the proposal; the details of the extension involved; when construction is likely to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23568/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department received an application from the school referred to for additional accommodation to provide classrooms, specialist rooms and ancillary accommodation.

The process of assessing the application is currently being finalised and my Department will be in contact with the school authority in the matter shortly.

School Transport

139. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department stated in a court case (details supplied) that Bus Éireann does not make a profit from school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23576/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The arrangements between the Department and Bus Éireann for the provision of national school transport services were the subject of High Court proceedings and an appeal to the Supreme Court. The Courts found in favour of the Department.

The arrangements under which the school transport scheme operates are set out in a document of 1975 which provides for payment to Bus Éireann on a cost recovery basis.

Student Support Schemes

140. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 221 of 9 May 2017, the reply to which did not address the question asked, if he will consider a change of policy to allow for greater flexibility for persons who already possess a qualification at a particular level and who wish to obtain a qualification in a different discipline at the same level already achieved due to the fact they are unable to find work in the field that their original qualification is in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23586/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The statutory provisions regarding “progression” are set out in the Student Support Act 2011 and secondary legislation in respect of Student Grant Scheme and Student Support Regulations.

Any amendment regarding the application of the rules around “progression” would require an amendment to the Student Support Act 2011 and the associated secondary legislation.

There are no plans to amend the existing policy regarding “progression”. However, my officials have recently commenced a review of this legislation to identify areas where the Act needs to be updated to reflect the changes that have taken place in Irish society and to ensure that supports are targeted effectively at those most in need. All relevant issues will be considered as part of this review.

Departmental Staff Data

141. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23929/17]

142. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23943/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 142 together.

The number of staff employed through agencies under the Department of Education and

Skills on the 31st March 2017 are outlined in the following table.

PUBLIC SECTOR NUMBERS RETURNS - END Q1 2017

-	-	Q1 2017
Non Commercial State Agencies*		
A11.7	Educational Research Centre - Pay	30
A14.1	PDST Technology in Education (NCTE)	10
B3.1	SOLAS	180
B6.1	QQI	71
C3	HEA - Administration incl IRC's	62
C14	Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA)	10
	Teaching Council	41
	Caranua	23
	TOTAL	427

Notes:

*Total excludes Agency Staff (GDA 4, HEA 1, & SOLAS 25)

Departmental Contracts Data

143. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23955/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department of Education & Skills utilises the services of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) which was established under the terms of the Public Services Management Act 2004 and is mandated to recruit staff to the Civil Service.

In relation to top level management positions competitions for these are conducted by the Committee on Top Level Appointments in the Civil Service (TLAC). The costs of such competitions are met by PAS and TLAC respectively.

In 2016 three promotional competitions were held for the following professional grades:

Inspectorate

Senior School Inspector

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Regional Director

Senior Educational Psychologist

A feature of such competitions is that one interview board member is an expert engaged

from outside the Department. In 2016 a total sum of €2,103.38 was paid to external interview board members. In 2016 my Department did not engage any external expertise to address any industrial relations matters.

My Department does not hold the information sought by the Deputy centrally on the bodies under its aegis. Officials at my Department have requested the information and it will be forwarded to the Deputy in due course.

Local Authority Funding

144. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount collected by local authorities in development contributions in each of the years 2000 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23386/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The requested information is not available in my Department. Local authorities operate on an accrual accounting basis and recognise income and expenditure as incurred relating to the accounting period concerned, regardless of the cash transactions. The Annual Financial Statements (AFSs), therefore, do not show cash movements or cash on hand in relation to development contributions but show the invoiced income and the amount of development contributions due to local authorities.

My Department is in the process of reviewing management information collected from the local government sector generally, including in respect of development contributions, and may make some changes to requirements in the coming year, following consultation with local authority Heads of Finance.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

145. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the review of planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial properties in cities, town and villages, as outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development, action 6, has taken place; if not, the stage the review is at; when the results will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23392/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Overall responsibility for the Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23 January 2017, rests with my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. However, as the proposal listed at Action 6 therein relates to a planning matter, its delivery falls to my Department.

The proposed action - allowing for the change of use of vacant commercial premises in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over groundfloor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process - was also reflected in the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland, published in July 2016.

My Department is presently progressing the drafting of the necessary revisions to the planning regulations to give effect to this action. It is intended that the new regulations, which will require the approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas, will be made before the Oireachtas Summer recess.

Rural Resettlement Scheme

146. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the relative requirements and appropriate targets for an additional rural resettlement initiative have been reviewed, as outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development, action 9; when the outcome of the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23393/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development- Realising our Potential has a clear objective of working across Government Departments to deliver a co-ordinated group of strategies to ensure the success of vibrant rural communities across Ireland.

I hope to bring forward policy proposals under the Action Plan that will cover a broad range of issues in housing, planning and community policy. The Rural Resettlement Initiative is an important part of this work as it has the potential, if designed and implemented properly, to contribute to improving the lives of those living and working in rural communities. I expect to be in a position to publish more details on this particular aspect of my Department's work before the end of 2017.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

147. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the roll-out of the housing assistance payment scheme; the local authorities covered to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23442/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a key Government priority and the accelerated roll-out of the scheme on a national basis was an important early action for completion in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

The nationwide roll out of the HAP scheme was completed with its introduction, on 1 March 2017, to the administrative areas of Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council; this means that eligible households in all 31 local authorities can now avail of the HAP scheme.

More than 21,000 households are currently in receipt of HAP support. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP, including the number of Rent Supplement transfers, in each local authority area to the end of Q1 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Departmental Expenditure

148. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23449/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There has been no expenditure by my Department, including Met Éireann, on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

My Department encourages the use of public transport by its staff through the operation of a Travel Pass Scheme under which they purchase an annual bus or rail pass in a tax efficient manner approved by the Revenue Commissioners. My Department also encourages the healthier, sustainable option of cycling through the operation of the Cycle to Work Scheme which was introduced under the Finance (No. 2) Act 2008.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

149. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23465/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as follows:

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Irish Water Safety	oireachtas@iws.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Pobal	oireachtasqueries@pobal.ie

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

150. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the ban on housing assistance payment will be lifted from Ballymun. [23493/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): One of the key functions of housing authorities is to provide or manage the provision of social housing support in a way that counteracts undue segregation between persons of different social backgrounds and ensures the provision of an appropriate mix of dwelling types and tenure classes.

Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority. Accordingly, local

authorities may refuse to provide HAP in an area where they consider there to be an over concentration of social housing supports in place.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Local Authority Functions

151. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will introduce legislation to provide city status to Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23500/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question Number 562 of 16 September 2016. The position is unchanged. If an additional city council were to be established, this would have significant implications for the county in which the area concerned is situated, particularly loss of functions of the relevant county council. Provision for this and in relation to other consequential matters would have to be made in the relevant legislation. I have no plans for legislation in this regard.

Housing Policy

152. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether there are significant problems with section 28(2) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, which only allows for a second extension for housing developments that commenced on site before their original planning permission expired, in view of the fact most of these would have been before 2012. [23536/17]

153. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason he has not commenced section 28 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016. [23537/17]

154. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the advice which can be given to developers whose planning permission and a section 42 extension have expired and are awaiting section 28(2) commencement to apply for a second extension; if, in the intervening period, all construction work should cease until such time as the Minister decides to commence section 28 and the developer can apply for an extension or if such developers should re-apply for planning permission; and his views on whether this is acceptable. [23538/17]

155. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if section 28(2) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Act provided for a second extension for a housing development with 20 or more units that had been commenced and had not required an EIA or AA screening in the initial application, rather than just in respect of a development of the type referred to in subsection 42(1)(a)(i) of the principal Act, as amended. [23539/17]

156. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether a major mistake was made by him and his officials in the

drafting of section 28(2) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016; and his plans to hold anyone to account for this error in view of the costly effect it is having and will have on delaying major housing developments for which planning permission expires. [23540/17]

157. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the specific amendments he plans to make to section 28(2) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016; and his views on whether the non-enactment of section 28(2) could have very serious consequences in delaying housing developments for which planning permission has expired. [23541/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 to 157, inclusive, together.

Section 28(2) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provides for a second extension of the duration of planning permissions relating to developments of 20 or more houses in specified circumstances. An amendment to the section 28(2) provisions was tabled by me at Dáil Committee Stage of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 which has now been incorporated in the text of the Bill currently being considered at Dail Report Stage. It is intended that the 2016 Bill will be enacted before the Oireachtas Summer recess, at which time I will be able to commence the section 28(2) provisions.

As well as applying to permissions where the extended duration expires on or after the coming into force of section 28(2), the provisions also apply to qualifying development where the extended duration of the permission expired, or will expire, between 19 July 2016 (the date of publication of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland) and the day preceding the commencement of section 28(2).

Section 28(2) was enacted to deal with issues relating to housing developments, where substantial works were carried out before the expiry of the original duration of the permission but where work was not completed during the extended duration of the permission.

I am open to considering a further time-limited amendment of section 28(2) that could possibly apply to relevant housing developments where the development to which the permission relates was commenced before the expiry of the period sought to be extended, where substantial works were carried out in that period, and where the development will be completed within a reasonable time. If details of developments that could qualify for a second extension of permission duration under an amendment along these lines could be shared with my Department, I will examine the matter further in the context of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 currently being progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Departmental Staff Data

158. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23930/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The details requested in relation to the number of persons that are employed under the aegis of my Department through agencies are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information

by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as follows:

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Irish Water Safety	oireachtas@iws.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Pobal	oireachtasqueries@pobal.ie

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

159. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations to include the hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23956/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To date in 2017 my Department has not paid external agencies or consultants for any work in relation to investigations undertaken in human resources or industrial relations including hiring or interviewing of staff.

Carer's Allowance Applications

160. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will grant a carer's allowance to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23396/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 19 July 2016. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 16 February 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Administration

161. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he will take to tackle the reported delays in maternity benefit payments. [23397/17]

162. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on whether the reported delays in maternity benefit need to be tackled as an emergency in view of the fact that it is the only source of income for women whose employers do not pay for their maternity leave. [23398/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

Maternity benefit claims are processed in leave commencement date order. The average time to process a paper claim is 6 weeks. Processing claims by leave commencement date order ensures that those whose maternity leave has already started, or is due to start soon, receive priority. Once a decision is made and the claim has been awarded, and where the leave has already commenced, payment issues on the following Monday and this payment will also include any arrears due to the customer at that point.

I accept that there is a delay in the processing of maternity benefit claims and my Department is working hard to bring the position up to date. To alleviate delays, additional staff have been assigned and staff are working overtime. Further additional staff have been assigned this week and will commence processing claims immediately. I want to assure customers that every effort is being made to ensure all claims are processed as quickly as possible.

The Department also facilitates online applications for maternity benefit and an automated decision is made where the customer submits all necessary information and where the detail provided can be validated. I would ask the Deputy to encourage women who are planning maternity leave to use this channel, if possible, as it provides the most effective method of applying for maternity benefit.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will issue in the case of persons (details supplied) with particular reference to the insolvency of the persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23425/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 288 of 14 February 2017, the decision to refuse an application for an exceptional needs payment in the case of the second person concerned was reviewed on request and the decision of the designated officer upheld. There are no outstanding applications for an exceptional needs payment in the case of the persons concerned.

It is open to the persons concerned to submit a fresh application for an exceptional needs payment if they do not have sufficient means to meet their needs. They should include all relevant documentation in support of their application. A decision will issue on completion of assessment of their application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

164. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23472/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal. With the exception of the Citizens Information Board, none of these bodies incurred costs in renting car park spaces in the period from 2011 to date.

The following table sets out the amount spent by the Citizens Information Board on the renting of car park spaces for the period in question.

Citizens Information Board:

YEAR	AMOUNT SPENT ON RENTING CAR PARK SPACES
2011	€3,288
2012	€3,900
2013	€3,200
2014	€3,800
2015	€3,700
2016	€3,835
2017 (to date)	€1,000

Free Travel Scheme

165. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to fully retain the free travel scheme; his further plans to make changes to the scheme in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23480/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 880,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million. The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

I am keenly aware that the free travel pass is a valuable support for older people and people with disabilities, and that it has a significant role in preventing their isolation and promoting social inclusion. I have no plans to introduce any measures which would reduce the benefit of the pass to beneficiaries or to reduce the number of people who qualify and I am fully committed to its retention.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

166. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of community employment schemes in the Dublin North area; the number of persons availing of these schemes, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23494/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The number of Community Employment schemes and number of participants in the Dublin North Division are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 - Dublin North CE figures as at 15 May 2017

Number of Schemes	No of Participants
59	1,459

A breakdown of the table is as follows:-

CE Area	No of Projects	No of Participants
Dublin 5	9	207
Dublin 9	7	171
Dublin 11	17	358
Dublin 13	3	55
Dublin 17	12	347
Dublin North County – Fingal	9	282
Meath (Part of)		
Ashbourne/Ratoath	1	16
Stanmullen	1	23
Total	59	1,459

In Quarter 3 2017, 15 projects and 319 participants relating to Dublin 15 will transfer to the Dublin North Division following the introduction of a new IT system.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Data

167. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of payments made under the back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme in 2016; the cost of these payments; the estimated number of individual payments to be made in 2017; and the estimated overall cost of these. [23495/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn.

End of year records show that under the 2016 BSCFA scheme, payments were made to over 154,000 families in respect of some 283,000 children at a cost of over €39.8 million. The Government has provided €37.4 million for the scheme in 2017. The reduced provision in 2017 arises from a projected decrease in the number of claimants arising from the reduction in the Live Register.

17 May 2017

The 2017 BSCFA scheme will operate from June to September. Similar to arrangements in previous years, the majority of the BSCFA payments will be automated with no application form required.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

168. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who applied to the Dublin central rents unit who have been refused rent supplement and instructed to apply for the housing assistance scheme since 1 January 2017. [23517/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Since 1st Jan 2017, the Dublin Central Rents Unit received 705 applications for rent supplement.

Under the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, HAP was rolled out to all Dublin Local Authority areas with effect from the 1st March 2017. Since 1st March, where an application for rent supplement is received from a client with a long term housing need as confirmed by the relevant Local Authority, the client is advised to make an application for HAP to their Housing Authority, in the first instance, as the preferred scheme for long term housing support.

From 1st March 114 applicants who submitted an application for Rent Supplement have been advised to apply for HAP to their relevant Housing Authority. No application for Rent Supplement has been disallowed on the basis that the client may qualify for HAP.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

169. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will permit the early termination of a contract with Turas Nua by a person (details supplied) who has secured an internship in a company that will further their employment prospects. [23521/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The aim of the JobPath service, which is provided for long term unemployed jobseekers only, is to assist them in finding sustainable full-time paid employment by providing intensive individual support and assistance. All decisions regarding the participation by jobseekers on work experience programmes such as the First Steps internship programme are taken by my Department.

I am advised by my officials that the customer concerned has been asked to provide details of the internship to the Department's local office for a decision and if she is eligible for the First Steps programme, her engagement with the JobPath service will be suspended to allow her to take up the opportunity. If she remains on the live register at the end of the internship, the JobPath company will resume providing support to help her find a full-time sustainable post.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

170. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a per-

son (details supplied) has not had their appeal for a farm assist payment assessed. [23561/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 11 April 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

171. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in a carer's allowance appeal for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23575/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 5 April 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Expenditure

172. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection the additional cost that would be incurred if the pre-2012 bands were re-established in the calculation of the State contributory pension in budget 2018; the further cost if this were to be backdated to all who incurred pension reductions as a result of the band changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23577/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced. This resulted in one of the bands (in respect of those with a yearly average of 20-47 contributions) being replaced with three bands (in respect of yearly averages of 40-47, 30-39, and 20-29 respectively). These additional bands more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life are likely to benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions.

These bands have been changed a number of times over the years. For example, there was no payment for people with a yearly average below 24 until 1973, or for those below 20 until 1989. Between the years 2000-2012, someone reaching retirement age with a yearly average of 47 contributions qualified for the same rate of payment (98% of the maximum rate) as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite generally their much more significant PRSI record, and regardless of their means. A person with an average of 48-52 PRSI contributions

per year over their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions. This meant that the last 20 years of a person's contributions to the Social Insurance Fund might have no impact upon their contributory pension entitlements.

When savings were required in 2012, as part of dealing with the fiscal crisis which faced the country, it was decided to make them by addressing this anomaly, rather than cut the core rate of the pension, which would have hit all pensioners, including the poorest, notably those solely dependent upon the State pension.

It is estimated that the cost of reverting to the percentage rate-bands which existed between 2000 and 2012 would be over €60 million in 2018, if introduced from January 2018, and that this annual cost would rise at a rate of some €10 million each year, that is an additional amount of €10 million in each subsequent year would be added to the base amount, e.g. €70 million in 2019, etc.

Calculation of the cost of backdating such a change (i.e. paying a lump sum in respect of the difference between such higher rates and those legislated for in the period 2012-2017) would be very complex, would require analysis of a number of historic datasets, and would be complicated by the fact that the State pension (transition) was abolished during the period in question. There would also be issues as to whether such back-dating applied only in respect of such pensioners who were still in payment at the date a decision was made to backdate such a change, or if there would also be similar payments made to the estates and/or surviving spouses of those pensioners who died beforehand. The effective date of such backdating would also impact upon the cost. It is very tentatively estimated that, depending on the details of such a payment, the cost of such backdating would be in the region of €200 million.

It should be noted that backdating of such an increase and payment as a lump sum would be extremely unusual, in the context of a weekly payment such as the State pension, and there are no plans to make such a payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 173 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

174. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23936/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department does not employ staff through agencies. All staff recruitment for my Department is carried out by the Public Appointments Services with the exception of unestablished Service Officers, Service Attendants and Interns who are recruited directly by the Department.

The number of staff employed by bodies under the aegis of my Department through recruitment agencies are outlined in the table.

Agency	Number of Staff
Citizens Information Board	2
Pensions Authority	1

Departmental Contracts Data

175. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23961/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The cost of all work including investigations, completed by external agencies/consultants during 2016 in the areas of human resources and industrial relations contracted out by my Department and by the bodies that come under its aegis are outlined in the table.

Department/Agency	Cost
Department of Social Protection	€52,551
Citizens Information Board	€207,128*
Pensions Authority	Nil

* €168,216 relates to a one-off project on Internal Change Management.

Foreign Naval Vessels

176. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the purpose of British Royal Navy submarine activities off the west coast; and if there was engagement with authorities here regarding recent reports of a British Royal Navy submarine operating near Achill Island, County Mayo. [23516/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 9 May last, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was contacted by the British Embassy in Dublin in relation to an emergency medical evacuation of a crew member of a UK Royal Navy submarine, located outside of Ireland's territorial seas.

Following a request from the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency, an Irish Coast Guard helicopter carried out an evacuation and the injured party was transferred to hospital for treatment.

Departmental Expenditure

177. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23451/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Any properties occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the State are rented and discharged by the Office of Public Works, in all but one case parking spaces form part of the demised premises. The Passport office in Cork rent two spaces at an annual cost of €3,300. This rate has remained static and is the amount that has been paid each year since 2011.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

178. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23467/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Any properties occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the State are rented and discharged by the Office of Public Works, in all but one case parking spaces form part of the demised premises. The Passport office in Cork rent two spaces at an annual cost of €3,300. This rate has remained static and is the amount that has been paid each year since 2011.

Garda Data

179. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of ministerial permissions his Department has given to members of An Garda Síochána to open bank accounts for official purposes since his Department was established by section and-or Garda division that received permission, in tabular form; the reason for the account opening and the year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23369/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will appreciate that Government Departments and Offices in discharging their legal roles and responsibilities operate bank accounts with commercial banks to facilitate payments and receipts generated in the normal course of their activities.

Such accounts are “public bank accounts” under Section 18 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act, 1866 on the basis that they will contain public moneys, either as a result of Voted moneys being deposited in them in order to make payments, or receipts being lodged by Departmental customers, which will ultimately be lodged to the Departmental Vote with the Paymaster General, or receipts being lodged for transfer to the Central Fund. The effect of that Section of the 1866 Act is also that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform may determine which accounts are opened as public bank accounts for public moneys.

In that context, the following schedule to this reply sets out the details of public bank accounts for An Garda Síochána sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform since its establishment in July 2011. The Deputy may wish to note, in terms of the number of individual accounts listed in the schedule for 2013, that in the course of a reconciliation exercise undertaken across Vote areas at that time in relation to public bank accounts my Department confirmed sanction for a substantial number Garda District Imprest Accounts advised by the Garda authorities already in existence. An Garda Síochána informed my Department that owing to the elapse of time and file archiving practices, reconfirmation of the sanction was required.

As can be seen from the schedule attached to this reply that reflecting the administrative structures in place in An Garda Síochána, these public bank accounts are held at individual Garda Districts across the country in order for the relevant Superintendents to discharge their functions as District Officers reflecting the administrative structures

As with all other features of financial management the relevant Accounting Officer for a Vote is ultimately responsible for the effective oversight of his or her Department's or Office's public bank accounts.

Garda Public Bank Accounts

Title	Function	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
Department of Social Protection Refunds	Refunds for employees on sick leave or maternity leave	2015	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ANGLESEA ST	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ASHBOURNE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ATHLONE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ARDEE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BAILIEBORO	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALBRIGGAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALLINA	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALLINASLOE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALLYCONNELL	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Clondalkin	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALLYMOTE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALLYSHANNON	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BALTINGLASS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BANDON	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BANTRY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BELMULLET	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BIRR	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BLACKROCK	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BLANCHARD-STOWN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BRAY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BRIDEWELL	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Title	Function	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
BRUFF	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CAHIR	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CARLOW	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CARRICK-MACROSS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CARRICK-ON-SHANNON	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CASTLEBAR	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CASTLEREA	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CAVAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CLAREMORRIS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CLIFDEN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CLONAKILTY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CLONMEL	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
COBH	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
COOLOCK	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
CRUMLIN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
DONNYBROOK	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
DROGHEDA	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
DUNDALK	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
DUNGARVAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
DUNLAOGHAIRE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ENNIS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ENNISCORTHY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
FERMOY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Title	Function	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
FITZGIBBON STREET	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
G.N.I.B	Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GALWAY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Garda HEADQUARTERS	Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GLENTIES	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GOREY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GRANARD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GURRANEBRAHER	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
HENRY STREET	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KANTURK	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KELLS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KEVIN ST	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KILDARE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KILKENNY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KILLARNEY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
KILRUSH	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
LETTERKENNY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
LISTOWEL	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
LONGFORD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
LOUGHREA	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
LUCAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MACROOM	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MALLOW	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Title	Function	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
MAYFIELD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MIDDLETON	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MILFORD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MONAGHAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
MULLINGAR	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
NAAS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
NAVAN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
NENAGH	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
NEW ROSS	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
NEWCAS-TLEWEST	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
PEARSE STREET	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
PORTLAOISE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
RAHENY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Terenure	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ROSCOMMON	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
ROXBORO ROAD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
S.D.U. & TRAVEL	Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
SALTHILL	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Ballymun	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
SLIGO	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
STORE ST	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TALLAGHT	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TEMPLEMORE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Title	Function	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
THOMASTOWN	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
THURLES	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TIPPERARY	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TOGHER	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TRAINING College	Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TRALEE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TRAMORE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TRIM	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TUAM	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
TULLAMORE	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
WATERFORD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
WESTPORT	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
WEXFORD	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
WICKLOW	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Leixlip	District Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
UN - CYPRUS	Imprest Account	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Interest Bearing account	Monies seized pending court direction	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GCVU	Fees received through Garda Central Vetting Unit	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Age Cards	Age card fees	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Firearms licensing fees	Firearm licence fees	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Interest Bearing account	Monies seized pending court direction	2013	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Forfeiture Account	Forfeited and unclaimed monies to the State	2011	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Departmental Staff Data

180. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23399/17]

181. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form. [23400/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

In response to the Deputy's question, a table outlines the number of people employed through agencies by my Department and the bodies under its aegis.

Organisation	Number of People
Institute of Public Administration	5
Special EU Programmes Body	5

The reply in relation to the Office of Public Works will follow within the next ten days in accordance with Standing Order 42A.

Garda Station Refurbishment

182. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to upgrade Newcastle West Garda station in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23418/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The refurbishment and upgrade of Newcastlewest Garda Station is included in the Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021, launched in October 2015 for An Garda Síochána. The Office of Public Works is currently progressing the delivery of all the projects listed in that plan.

OPW has received a Brief of requirements for a District Headquarter Station in Newcastlewest from An Garda Síochána and has carried out a feasibility study. OPW is currently progressing the appointment of a design team in order to further advance this project.

Departmental Expenditure

183. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23455/17]

184. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23471/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán

Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 184 together.

The table schedules the costs incurred by way of agreements held by the Commissioners of Public Works for providing stand-alone car parking facilities for various Government Departments and agencies. There are also car parking spaces for which the breakdown of costs is not available as these are covered in the overall cost of leases held by the Commissioners for the purpose of providing office accommodation.

Car Parking Costs 2011 - 2017

2017 Expenditure to 15th May	2016 Expenditure	2015 Expenditure	2014 Expenditure	2013 Expenditure	2012 Expenditure	2011 Expenditure
€530,000.98	€1,807,848.87	€1,560,348.27	€1,288,414.47	€1,770,495.54	€2,776,448.30	€2,929,901.24

Departmental Contracts Data

185. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on. [23485/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the table outlines the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of my Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff.

Organisation	Monetary Value
Public Appointments Service (PAS)	€157,823* (last 12 months)
Institute of Public Administration (IPA)	€30,305 (to the end of 2016)

*PAS are the centralised recruitment provider for the Civil Service and much of the Public Service who procure external search services and in-depth assessments for some senior executive posts. Over the last 12 months, €157,823 was paid to four external providers in respect of six recruitment campaigns.

The reply in relation to the Office of Public Works will follow within the next ten days in accordance with Standing Order 42A.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

186. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will engage with a group (details supplied) in upcoming negotiations to ensure that the rights and conditions for retired public servants are fully addressed as part of future agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23511/17]

188. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will meet with representatives of a group (details supplied) to discuss the restoration of pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23564/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 188 together.

There is no legislative provision for access to third-party adjudication in respect of pension

increases for recipients of public service pensions. Indeed there is no such facility for recipients of the Contributory State Pension. However, the interests and concerns of public service pensioners in relation to public service pension issues have been regularly articulated in meetings between the Alliance of Retired Public Servants and my Department. This engagement has also included meetings between the Alliance, myself and my predecessor. Through that process of engagement with the Alliance, I believe that public service pensioners have had, and continue to be afforded, a meaningful and direct means of articulating their concerns in relation to pensions and related issues.

The period since the Alliance's engagement with my Department commenced in 2013 has been marked by notable legislated pension improvements for many public service pensioners. Specifically, public service pensioners are benefitting significantly from the substantial reversal of the cuts to public service pensions above specified thresholds which were originally imposed by way of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) under the FEMPI legislation.

I and my Department are fully committed to maintaining the well-established dialogue with the Alliance of Retired Public Servants. Through ongoing recourse to that dialogue process, I believe that retired public servants and their representatives can be confident that their pension concerns will receive full and proper consideration as they have done in the past.

Services for People with Disabilities

187. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of installing a changing place facility for adults with disabilities in Áras an Uachtaráin; his plans to construct more of these facilities; the proposed locations of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23513/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Changing place is a combined toilet, shower and changing room for use by people with complex and multiple disabilities who require the help of assistants.

In 2016, a changing place facility was installed in Áras an Uachtaráin at a cost of just over €60,000.

Work is underway to provide a changing place facility in Farmleigh. Planning permission has been obtained and tenders for its construction will shortly be invited.

The Commissioners of Public Works are assessing the suitability of other properties for the provision of changing place facilities. Consideration will be given to progressing further projects once these assessments are complete and subject to availability of funding.

Question No. 188 answered with Question No. 186.

Action Plan for Rural Development

189. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the four innovation hubs in the Gaeltacht regions of counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Kerry, as outlined in action 84 of the Action Plan for Rural Development, have been developed; if not, the stage of development each hub has reached; the completion date for the hubs; the amount each hub will cost to develop; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23387/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that the following is the current position in respect of the four innovation hubs referred to by the Deputy:

County Donegal: Áislann Ghaoth Dobhair

The work on the Digital Hub in Áislann Ghaoth Dobhair has now been completed. This development is part of the total investment made by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Áislann Ghaoth Dobhair. The digital hub will be open to the public in early June 2017.

County Kerry: Mol Tech – Daingean Uí Chúis

This digital hub opened to the public on 28 April 2017. It is being managed by local community groups under the umbrella of the Dingle Chamber and supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry County Council.

Co. Mayo: Digital Unit, Béal an Mhuirthead

This digital hub is scheduled to open before the end of 2017 and will be managed by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Co. Galway: Digital Unit, An Spidéal

Capital provision is being set aside by Údarás na Gaeltachta to adapt a former factory in An Spidéal as the digital hub and Enterprise Development Center to serve the Connemara Coast. It is intended that this will be open to the public before the end of the year and will be managed by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Údarás na Gaeltachta has further advised me that the development of digital hubs and innovation centres is central to the organisation's strategy for the development of various Gaeltacht areas and that, in that context, An tÚdarás intends to develop digital hubs in other Gaeltacht areas, including on Gaeltacht islands, in the foreseeable future.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

190. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the recommendations of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas report and the charter for rural Ireland have been reviewed, as outlined in action 86 of the Action Plan for Rural Development; when the review findings will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23388/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The CEDRA report was a substantial body of research work on the issues affecting rural Ireland and it helped inform the preparation of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development which I published last January. The Action Plan builds upon, and goes further than, both the CEDRA report and the Charter for Rural Ireland. While the remit of the CEDRA report was to focus on the economic development of rural areas, the Action Plan for Rural Development also addresses the social and cultural development of rural communities.

The Plan contains over 270 commitments to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies, and acts as an overarching structure for a coordinated whole-of-Government approach to rural development.

Action 86 of the Action Plan for Rural Development states that my Department, in conjunc-

tion with relevant partners, will “review the recommendations of the CEDRA Report and the Charter for Rural Ireland and identify how best to progress any recommendations that have not yet been implemented”.

This action is due to be completed by the end of September and I can confirm that my Department has commenced work on the action with a view to its completion within the anticipated timeframe.

The outcome of the review will be published at the end of the year as part of the six-monthly Progress Report on the implementation of the Action Plan. However, I am open to considering publishing the details earlier, to avoid any undue delay.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

191. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the industry-wide long-term plan for Ireland as a global hub for the production of film, television, drama and animation has been drawn up, as stated in the Action Plan for Rural Development; if not, the stage of completion the plan is at; the estimated date for publication; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23389/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Creative Ireland Programme 2017 – 2022 which was announced in December 2016 is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing.

The objective of the fourth pillar of the Programme – establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production – is to elevate the creative industries including media, architecture, design, digital technology, fashion, food and crafts together on an all of government basis. The initial focus of the Creative Ireland programme this year is to undertake to develop an industry-wide, long-term plan for Ireland as a global hub for the production of Film, TV Drama and Animation by the end of 2017. This objective is also reflected in the Action Plan for Rural Ireland given the importance of the film industry to rural Ireland.

In this regard, my Department has commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries, in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. This study will examine the economic impact including employment and the potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector. Following an open tender process, Olsberg SPI Ltd in association with Nordicity, was selected to conduct the study in November last year. The commissioning of the study was also a commitment in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016.

The recommendations of the economic study will inform the development of the plan envisaged under the Creative Ireland Programme and Action Plan for Rural Ireland.

On 5 May last, I hosted a very successful Media Production Workshop at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham which attracted attendance by representatives of the film, broadcast, animation and gaming industries. The outcomes of this event will also input into the consultants study and the proposed Government plan. It is intended that the economic study will be completed this Summer and that the Government plan based on the study will be published in the early Autumn.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

192. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the review of the rural economic development zone initiative with regard to its impact on rural communities; the estimated date of completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23390/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) are geographic areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activity and development. The central objective of the REDZ concept is to use the synergies and interdependencies between rural towns and their outlying areas to generate local economic activity.

A pilot REDZ initiative was launched in 2015 and, based on that pilot, I launched a further phase of the initiative in 2016. Following a competitive process, I approved total funding of €6.142 million in 2016 for 47 REDZ projects across the country.

As outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development, I intend to conduct a review of the REDZ initiative this year. I anticipate that the review will commence in Quarter 3 and that it will be finalised by the end of the year.

In the meantime, based on initial feedback from the 2015 REDZ pilot, I am welcoming, under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme which I launched in April, applications that demonstrate a REDZ-type component, to stimulate economic activity between towns/villages and their outlying areas.

Action Plan for Rural Development

193. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the scheme to indemnify private landowners with regard to recreational users of their lands, as outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development; the estimated date of publication of this scheme; and the estimated cost of same. [23391/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The Occupiers Liability Act 1995 provides significant protection to landowners with regards to recreational users on their land.

In addition to the protection afforded under the Occupiers Liability Act 1995, an insurance policy is held by the National Trails Office which indemnifies all landowners and occupiers whose property or land is crossed or adjoins a “Recreational Trail”, provided the trail has been inspected and approved by the National Trails Office. The cover extends to liability attaching to the land or property owner arising from a user of the “Recreational Trail” sustaining accidental bodily injury or property damage when on the land of the owner for recreational or leisure activities connected with the designated Recreational Trail.

Nonetheless, my Department is working closely with the State Claims Agency in relation to the development and implementation of a strengthened National Indemnity Scheme, as indicated in the Action Plan for Rural Development, which would indemnify private landowners against claims from recreational users for injury or damage to property.

Discussions are at an advanced stage and I anticipate that a scheme will be agreed in a number of pilot areas before the end of 2017.

Departmental Expenditure

194. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent by her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23444/17]

195. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23460/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

In general, matters relating to the acquisition and leasing of property for my Department and the bodies under its aegis are the responsibility of the Office of Public Works.

I am advised that no expenditure was incurred by my Department on renting car park spaces during the period in question.

The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the amount spent by those bodies and agencies under the aegis of my Department that have incurred discrete expenditure on the rental of car park spaces during the period in question is set out in the tables below.

Body	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (to date)
Irish Film Board	€3,569	€6,711	€8,089	€11,961	€12,210	€12,201	€10,183

An Foras Teanga (the North South Language Body), comprising Foras na Gaeilge and Ulster Scots Agency has advised the following expenditure in respect of car parking offices in Belfast.

Body	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (to date)
Foras na Gaeilge*	€8,780	€8,276	€8,780	€8,372	€6,667	€10,286	€2,069
Ulster Scots Agency	£10,367	£11,647	£9,725	£4,987	£4,503	£5,500	£4,200

*Converted from sterling.

Wildlife Regulations

196. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23484/17]

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

Following a review of Section 40, which involved, *inter alia*, consideration of submissions from interested parties, I announced proposals in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period

on a pilot two year basis. The legislation required to allow for these pilot measures is included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was published in January 2016.

The Bill recently completed its passage through Seanad Éireann and will now go to Dail Éireann. In the meantime, the existing provisions relating to Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts remain in force.

The question relating to restrictions on farming in areas where burning has occurred is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. That Department operates the Basic Payment Scheme and other schemes including GLAS.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and An Garda Síochána, as appropriate, to investigate the causes of wild fires and, where evidence is forthcoming, to pursue appropriate enforcement under the Wildlife Acts or other legislation.

The main source of wild gorse fires is thought to be the deliberate starting of fires without concern for the consequences. Aside from such malicious activities, one of the main challenges is to encourage members of the public, (including landowners, farmers and recreational users of publicly accessible land), to act responsibly at all times, to be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, to be mindful of the need to protect property, both publicly owned and privately owned and to appreciate the value of our natural heritage, particularly in our National Parks, Nature Reserves and Designated (Natura 2000) Sites.

National Archives

197. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to review the time limits for the release of materials under the National Archives Act 1986; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23502/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is currently working on a draft Bill, in conjunction with the Office of the Parliamentary Draftsman, which will reduce the time limit for the release of certain departmental records after 20 years rather than the current 30 years.

The Bill will propose to implement the change on a phased basis starting with the Departments of Taoiseach, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice and Equality and the Office of the Attorney General.

I expect to bring the Bill to Government in advance of publication very shortly.

National Archives

198. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff employed by the National Archives per annum in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23503/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The following table outlines the staffing figures for the National Archives since the establishment of my Department in June 2011.

Year End	Headcount	WTE
2011	47	45.5
2012	48	46.3
2013	48	46.3
2014	46	44.2
2015	44	42.4
2016	48	47.2
2017 (end April)	53	51.53

I am advised that staffing levels in the National Archives and across my Department are kept under regular review and resources required to meet business needs are assessed through the workforce planning process, having regard to Department of Public Expenditure and Reform directives, guidelines and circulars on staffing, as well as to emerging business priorities and the availability of payroll resources.

National Archives

199. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to extend the capacity of the National Archives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23504/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have earmarked €8 million in funding for the first phase in a capital development plan at the National Archives. The OPW has appointed a design team to the project and I expect it to go to tender later this year. This significant capital investment will address many of the long-standing infrastructural issues that face the National Archives.

Thanks to improvements in the economy, I have been in a position to secure additional funding for the National Archives over the past 3 years which has seen current funding increase from €1,105,000 to €1,365,000. This included providing the National Archives with a special allocation of €150,000 for 2016 and 2017 to assist in work being undertaken in association with the Office of Government Chief Information Officer on a public sector records management policy.

I will continue to support the Archives to the greatest extent possible and hope to be in a position to provide additional funding as the Exchequer position continues to improve.

Departmental Staff Data

200. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of her Department through agencies in the public sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23926/17]

201. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the persons employed through agencies in her Department, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23939/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 201 together.

I am advised that currently there is nobody in my Department that was recruited through an

agency. The information in respect of the bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in the following tabular format.

Body	Number of agency staff
Arts Council	12
Ulster Scots Agency	0
Irish Film Board	2
Chester Beatty Library	1
Crawford Art Gallery	0
Foras na Gaeilge	0
Heritage Council	0
Irish Museum of Modern Art	6
National Concert Hall	4
National Library of Ireland	0
National Museum of Ireland	3
Údarás na Gaeltachta	0
Waterways Ireland	2
National Gallery of Ireland	12
Western Development Commission	0
Total	42

Departmental Contracts Data

202. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23951/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no Human Resource or Industrial Relations work was contracted out by my Department to external agencies this year. Four agencies under the aegis of my Department contracted out such work to a total monetary value of €100,174 in 2017 to date. This relates to work contracted out by the Chester Beatty Library (€3,099), the National Gallery of Ireland (€89,000), the National Museum of Ireland (€4,420), and the Heritage Council (€3,655). I am further advised that, of this amount, €95,754 related to recruitment costs. It should be noted that the National Gallery of Ireland has had exceptional recruitment requirements due to the planned reopening of the refurbished historic wings in June of this year.

Assisted Human Reproduction

203. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding the regulation of surrogacy; the timeframe for this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23580/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Officials in my Department are currently drafting the General Scheme of legislative provisions on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated research, which will include provisions relating to surrogacy. It is envisaged that the General Scheme will be completed by the end of June 2017. Once the General Scheme

has been completed, a memo will be submitted for Government approval, and once approved by Government, I intend to submit the General Scheme to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The proposed legislation will take cognisance of the 2014 Supreme Court judgment in the *MR & Anor v An tArd Chláraitheoir & Ors* (surrogacy) case. It is envisaged that the legislation will establish a mechanism for transfer of parentage from the surrogate (and her husband, if she has one) to the intending parents.

In addition, it is envisaged that under the surrogacy provisions at least one of the intending parents will have to be genetically related to the child. Surrogacy will be permitted on an altruistic basis where the payment of defined and receiptable reasonable expenses will be allowed, however, commercial surrogacy will be prohibited.

The intention of the legislation in this area is to protect, promote and ensure the health and safety of surrogate mothers, others involved in the process (such as donors and parents) and, most importantly, the children who will be born as a result of AHR.

Primary Care Centres

204. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the future of the vacant health centre in Rathangan, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23370/17]

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

Home Help Service Provision

205. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of home help assistance for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23401/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

206. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of all recreational and training activity providers who are currently employed by the Health Service Executive, HSE, in County Kerry; the services provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23404/17]

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 a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

207. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be granted an appointment in Tallaght or in another hospital offering the same service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23405/17]

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

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

Departmental Funding

208. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding allocated to each of the various Alzheimer's associations across the State in each of the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23406/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. A list of the organisations including dementia specific organisations, that received National Lottery funding in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 is available on the Department of Health's website:

<http://health.gov.ie/about-us/list-of-organisations-who-received-lottery-funding-2009-2016>.

Infectious Disease Incidence

209. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason tests in German laboratories for the detection of Lyme disease are not recognised here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23407/17]

210. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns about the accuracy of tests carried out here to detect Lyme disease; the testing process; the mechanisms in place to ensure accuracy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23408/17]

211. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if there is a specific module or component in medical training covering the detection, diagnosis and treatment of Lyme dis-

ease; if such training is compulsory; the length of training required on this particular issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23409/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 to 211, inclusive, together.

Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE has extensive information concerning Lyme disease on its website <http://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lyme-disease/>.

Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease. The standard approach to Lyme diagnostics is a two-stage approach and involves using a sensitive enzyme immunoassay (EIA) as an initial, screening step. Screening EIAs can be insufficiently specific, giving false-positive reactions in the presence of other similar bacteria, and certain other viral infections, including glandular fever. In addition, blood samples from patients with autoimmune disorders and other inflammatory conditions can also lead to false-positive results. Samples giving positive or equivocal results in screening tests are further investigated in a second-stage immunoblot (Western blot) tests. Use of immunoblot testing greatly increases specificity. Using this two stage approach will give a great degree of certainty around the diagnosis of Lyme.

All clinical (and other) laboratories in Ireland must undergo continuous quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the diagnostics they provide is maintained at the highest international level for human diagnostics. Some laboratories abroad do not use antibody tests like the EIA (screening ELISA test) and Western Blot and instead will use other types of tests, for example, testing for levels of a specific white blood cell (CD-57) or lymphocyte transformation tests (tests to measure how specific cells in a person's immune system respond when exposed to antigens against *Borrelia burgdorferi* - the bacterium responsible for Lyme disease). These types of tests are not currently recommended by international groups such as the CDC, Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) or BIA for a number of reasons:

1. There is not enough scientific evidence that they are suitable tests to diagnose Lyme disease;
2. There is no standard method to perform and interpret these kind of tests; and
3. Positive results in these kinds of tests may be due to other illnesses or conditions and not just *Borrelia* infection.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC, the Infectious Diseases Society of Ireland, the Irish Society of Clinical Microbiologists, the Irish Institute of Clinical Neuroscience and the Irish College of General Practitioners agreed a Consensus Statement on the Clinical Management of Lyme Borreliosis, which endorsed the previously referenced, internationally recognised set of guidelines (those of the IDSA) to Medical Practitioners to ensure a standardised approach to the diagnosis and management of Lyme disease in Ireland.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has established a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee, the aim of which is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine,

Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health and Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer and, very importantly, a representative from Tick Talk Ireland, the primary Support Group for Lyme disease in Ireland.

The initial work of the Lyme Borreliosis Sub-committee involved a survey of laboratory methods for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis in Ireland, the development of Lyme borreliosis guidance for general practitioners, the publication of medical media articles to highlight diagnostics and laboratory methods relating to Lyme borreliosis available in Ireland. Material has been produced which is aimed both at the general public and General Practitioners.

There is extensive information for the public and health professionals on the HPSC website. This information for the public includes:

- Lyme Disease Frequently Asked Questions;
- Laboratory testing for Lyme Disease: FAQs for general public;
- Lyme Disease Illustrations; and
- CDC's instructions on how to remove a tick.

There is significant support and information for health professionals on the HPSC website. These supports include a fact sheet on tick borne diseases, including Lyme Disease. This fact sheet gives information on clinical the disease, transmission routes, prevention measures, diagnosis, and management and treatment. There is also an erythema migrans (EM) diagnostic tool to aid health professionals in the diagnosis of EM, which is frequently the earliest clinical manifestation of Lyme borreliosis.

With regard to medical education and training, the content and composition of curricula and specialist training programmes is a matter for the Medical Council and the recognised medical education or postgraduate training bodies. Under the Medical Practitioners Act, all medical degree courses and specialist training programmes in Ireland are required to be accredited by the Council. As of May 2011, doctors are legally obliged to maintain their professional competence by enrolling in approved professional competence schemes and following requirements set by the Medical Council. In this context, the Council has established a range of professional competence schemes through formal arrangements with the recognised postgraduate training bodies. Schemes are operated by the postgraduate training bodies and have been developed to drive good professional practice, which is centred on patient safety and quality of patient care.

As testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland there is no requirement for people to travel to other EU Member States to access these services.

Services for People with Disabilities

212. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the diagnosis of a person (details supplied) will not be confirmed in a report prior to the enrolment of the person in preschool; if the report can be provided in time for the person to enrol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23411/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the servic-

es they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Health Reports

213. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a report on the external evidence review to inform the parameters of a revision of *A Vision for Change*; if he will publish same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23417/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): *'A Vision for Change'* came to the end of its 10-year term in 2016 and preparations for a review and updating of policy have been underway since early last year. In September 2016, an external evidence and expert review was commissioned from WRC Consultants as the first step in determining the parameters of a revision of *'A Vision for Change'*.

This review was completed on 17 February 2017, and will provide evidence to determine the policy direction for a revision of *'A Vision for Change'*, both in terms of international best practice and the experience of implementing *A Vision for Change*. The review is currently being assessed by the Department of Health, and will shortly be published.

In line with a commitment given to Dáil Éireann on 6 October 2016, an Oversight Group will be established within three months of the review being finalised to oversee the development of a new policy for mental health based on the outcome of the Expert Review. Terms of Reference for this Group are being finalised. The policy review process will also involve consultation with key stakeholders.

Nursing Home Fees

214. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the substantial increase in nursing home fees following a review by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (details supplied); his further views on the impact this will have on fee paying patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23423/17]

219. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the reason nursing home fee increases are being retrospectively applied to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry without written or verbal notice of the increase; if these additional fees will be waived in view of the inadequate consultation and notice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23478/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 219 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Departmental Expenditure

215. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23452/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department did not rent any car parking spaces in the years concerned. If we do require any additional parking for any particular purpose, the Department would request the Office of Public Works to provide same.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

216. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23468/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department does not routinely compile or hold information in relation to rental of car park spaces for agencies under the aegis of the Department and the Deputy should contact the relevant CEO/Director/Chairperson. I have referred the question to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy in relation to its expenditure on car parking from 2011.

Medical Card Eligibility

217. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if he will re-open a medical card application for a person (details supplied) in view of exceptional circumstances which were out of the person's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23475/17]

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

Nursing Home Beds Data

218. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the National Treatment Purchase Fund will provide a breakdown to justify the increase of the cost of a nursing home bed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23476/17]

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

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which

are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
 - Bed and board;
 - Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living;
- and
- Laundry service.

The legislation underpinning the Nursing Homes Support Scheme requires each private nursing home to negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme. The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an individual basis. The NTPF may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process with the objective of setting a fair price which delivers value for money to the individual and the State. In negotiating with nursing homes, the NTPF has regard to:

- Costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
- Price(s) previously charged;
- Local market price; and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of issues have been identified for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanisms by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the review of the pricing system for private long-term residential care facilities. This Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the NTPF, and work in this area is well advanced.

The NTPF has no role in relation to the cost of care in public residential facilities. Section 33(2) of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act, 2009 provides for the HSE to charge for the cost of care in long-term residential care settings. The components that make up the cost of care are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 214.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

220. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will reply to correspondence (details supplied) in regard to nurses with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland status who were refused critical skills work permits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23479/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Department Officials have been in contact with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy.

I will respond to you in relation to this matter in due course.

Hospital Waiting Lists

221. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting on the inpatient waiting list for the urology department in Saint James's Hospital for six months, 12 months, 24 months, 36 months and 48 months respectively. [23481/17]

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.

HSE Planning

222. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the expected date of publication of the HSE action plan for scoliosis; his plans for the implementation of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23482/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Waiting List Action Plan for Scoliosis has now been finalised and will be communicated shortly. The plan includes both measures to increase capacity for scoliosis treatments in the children's hospitals and proposals for the outsourcing of procedures. A number of children have been identified as clinically appropriate to have their scoliosis surgery in other hospitals, such as the Mater, Cappagh, and overseas in Stanmore.

While the Action Plan endeavours to deliver on short to medium term reduction in the waiting lists, in tandem the HSE is working to develop a long-term sustainable solution for scoliosis and paediatric orthopaedic cases.

Services for People with Disabilities

223. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for assessment of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23486/17]

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.

Nursing Staff

224. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the nurse shortage in a health care centre (details supplied) in Ballymun. [23492/17]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

225. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents currently waiting from zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 12 months, 12 to 18 months, 18 to 24 months and over 24 months for an appointment for child and adolescent mental health services in CHO area 1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23497/17]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

226. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient child and adolescent beds in the mental health services that are due to come on stream in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23498/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

227. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23501/17]

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 Services

228. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the reason the medical assessment unit in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital was recently closed; the number of such closures in 2016 and to date in 2017; if there will be no further closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23505/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the framework of the HSE Full Capacity Protocol, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda has in place an agreed escalation plan within which to operate during periods of ED overcrowding. It sets out a range of extraordinary special measures which can be activated throughout the escalation process as a last resort.

These measures aim to improve the flow of admitted patients through unscheduled care pathways. As part of this a Medical Assessment Unit may temporarily be used to accommodate a locally agreed number of extra patients to address the overcrowding. This is often referred to as being used for surge capacity. At these times, patients are seen in the Emergency Department rather than in the Medical Assessment Unit (MAU). While this temporary change of use may not be ideal in terms of the utilisation of these units, it does enable hospitals to alleviate overcrowding in EDs and afford patients a greater degree of dignity.

Recent data from the HSE indicates that despite an increase in over 3% in attendances for the first quarter in 2017, the situation at the Our Lady of Lourdes ED has been improving, with 42% fewer patients waiting a trolley, as compared to the same period last year. This equates to 850 fewer patients on trolleys this year so far. This ED has also seen a sustained improvement in Patient Experience Times during this period.

I have been advised that the management and use of the Medical Assessment Unit facility in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital continues to adhere to standard operating procedures as set out in the HSE Full Capacity Protocol.

In relation to increasing capacity at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, construction of a new ward block, including Clinical Decision Unit is ongoing. The ward block is expected to be completed later this year. I expect that this increased capacity will further reduce the need to initiate the Full Capacity Protocol.

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

Respite Care Services Provision

229. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 619 to 621, inclusive, of 11 April 2017, the position regarding the need for respite services for persons with disabilities in each local health area for each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23506/17]

230. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 619 to 621, inclusive, of 11 April 2017, the position regarding the fact that there are no dedicated respite services for children in County Louth; the steps he will take to address

same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23507/17]

231. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 619 to 621, inclusive, of 11 April 2017, the funding provided in each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017 for respite beds for persons with disabilities; the way in which the funding was distributed, by location and organisation; the number and type of services provided at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23508/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 to 231, inclusive, together.

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

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

232. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if the long-term illness scheme will include Crohn's disease on the list of approved conditions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23510/17]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

233. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 560 of 4 April 2017, if the 2,786 persons waiting more than 12 months for cataract surgery can avail of the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23522/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF for the first tranche of funding in the

region of €5m for a waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that in excess of 2000 patients waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure will have received an appointment for their procedure by 30 June 2017. The NTPF has advised that the Initiative has commenced and patients are currently receiving their appointments. Specifically, over 350 patients awaiting cataract procedures who would have been waiting for longer than 18 months by the end of June have been identified as appropriate to test the first clinical pathway for this outsourcing initiative.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services.

These plans have now been finalised and will be communicated shortly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

234. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will include persons with asthma in the long-term illness scheme or in a targeted scheme such as a chronic disease card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23523/17]

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.

Health Services

235. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the commitment in the national clinical programme for asthma to a free structural asthma management programme for every person with asthma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23524/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Funding

236. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide core funding for supporting educational programmes by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23525/17]

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 Waiting Lists

237. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for hip surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23526/17]

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 Charges

238. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the €632,117,844 income raised by private charges (details supplied) by hospitals in 2016 which was charged following emergency admissions; and the amount which was charged following elective admission in each of the years from 2014 to 2016, in tabular form. [23527/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

239. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include asthma in the long-term illness scheme or on another targeted scheme such as a chronic disease card (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23545/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

240. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to conduct a study to show savings his Department could make regarding accident and emergency visits, bed occupancy or primary care visits from asthma sufferers and those diagnosed with asthma if they were to have access to preventative asthma medication either through a long-term illness scheme or

a chronic disease card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23546/17]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

241. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of ambulance services at Sligo University Hospital; if there are periods for which there is a reduced service; the areas in which a service is not provided; the location and times when this occurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23552/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

242. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding hip replacement surgery for a person (details supplied) at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore; if same can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23581/17]

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

243. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment for a medical procedure for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23582/17]

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

244. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a referral for a medical appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23584/17]

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

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

Departmental Staff Data

245. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23932/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked that the HSE respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to them.

In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Departmental Staff Data

246. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23945/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The staff of my Department are recruited through the Public Appointments Service with a small number of staff seconded from the Health Service Executive and other health sector bodies. Accordingly none of the positions in the Department are filled through recruitment agencies.

GLAS Eligibility

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review a person's (details supplied) eligibility for GLAS in view of the fact that their amendment to land parcels was submitted to his Department ahead of deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23403/17]

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

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases with regard to the Wild Bird Cover action. Department officials have examined this issue and the application is now being further processed with a view to issuing payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

Fishing Licences

248. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will publish the 26 submissions received as part of the review of replacement capacity under the sea fishing licensing regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23430/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As Minister I have responsibility for policy in relation to sea-fishing boat licensing under Section 3(3) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, as amended by Section 99 of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006. In this context, Section 3 of the Act makes provision for Ministerial Policy Directives to issue to the independent Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats. I am, however, precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to individual cases, or a group of cases, with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned under Section 3(5) of the 2003 Act.

I received proposals from a Producer Organisation which, in summary, relate to the possibility of reducing the requirement to provide 100% replacement capacity with the relevant track record to 80% (the balance being sourced from capacity without track record). I undertook a public consultation process on these proposals and made a consultation paper available which set out the background to fleet policy and carried out an analysis of the current situation. The consultation paper examined the implications of the proposals made by the Producer Organisation and also put forward alternative options. This consultation ended on 28 February 2017.

As the Deputy notes, 26 submissions were received in this regard and they are currently being examined. To support transparency in this process, I can inform the Deputy that all views received on the Consultation Document are now publicly available on my Department's website.

Superlevy Fine

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding milk fines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23431/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Super levy Instalment scheme was introduced in 2015. This scheme was offered by the EU Commission to Member States to implement on a voluntary basis to allow producers who had incurred super levy debt to spread the cost over three years (2015–2017) interest free. This repayment schedule took the form of a 33% lump sum in 2015 and the balance to be spread over five equal instalments in 2016 and 2017 over the peak production period of May to September. Ireland was one the few MS with a super levy bill to introduce the scheme.

At the end of the milk quota regime in April 2015 Ireland exceeded its quota by 4.4%, resulting in a super levy bill of €71 million for 6,400 Irish farmers. Each Member State was obliged to settle the liability in full in 2015 with the EU Commission and could then re-coup the money from its farmers as per the scheme. My Department chose to implement the scheme on

the basis that it would minimise the burden on the sector during a period of planned expansion here as well as helping with the immediate cash flow difficulties for farmers faced with such a bill.

In 2015 2,700 producers opted to pay their full levy (€16.7 million) to my Department up front with €18.9m collected from the remaining 3,700 producers by 1 October 2015. These 3,700 producers are the participants in the instalment scheme and 2015 was the first year of their three-year repayment phase. My Department introduced the scheme of phased recoupment from farmers who had the option of joining the scheme and spreading their repayment over three years.

This scheme was financed from Exchequer funds and so my Department is responsible for ensuring that the funds advanced to the Commission on behalf of farmers are recouped on behalf of the taxpayer. The person in question incurred a superlevy fine because they supplied almost double their assigned quota in the 2014/15 quota year.

In any event, given that the milk quota regime ended on 31 March 2015 and all superlevy liabilities due to the EU Commission were paid by Ireland on 1 November 2015, it is not possible at this stage to have any super levy liabilities recalculated for individual producers. There is no mechanism within the relevant EU Regulations implementing the scheme to cancel any of the liabilities.

Departmental Expenditure

250. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23443/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The table outlines the amount spent by my Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

Year	Amount Paid (excluding VAT) Total
2011	11130.01
2012	3779.97
2013	3779.97
2014	4298.97
2015	3779.97
2016	3779.97
2017	1951.20

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

251. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23459/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves. The twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department have been requested to provide the de-

tails directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

TAMS Data

252. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received under TAMS 2; the approvals issued for this; the payments claims lodged and the number of cases approved for payment in 2016 and to date in 2017, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons who have been approved for TAMS 2 who have yet to receive payment in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23477/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The total number of applications received to date under TAMS II is 11,809 and 8,414 approvals have issued. 1,398 payment claims have been received and 866 applicants have been approved for payment. Approvals are issued and applicants are paid on an on going basis on receipt of an online payment claim and following checks in the local office. The breakdown by county basis is detailed in the table.

County	Applications Received	Approvals Issued	Claims Lodged	Approved For Payment
Carlow	139	104	12	9
Cavan	473	313	37	19
Clare	380	290	50	44
Cork	1782	1339	245	137
Donegal	626	373	22	19
Dublin	41	25	3	2
Galway	875	578	104	70
Kerry	852	595	110	52
Kildare	180	113	23	7
Kilkenny	584	458	90	70
Laois	311	240	42	29
Leitrim	188	119	18	9
Limerick	582	461	77	41
Longford	162	111	15	13
Louth	129	81	9	2
Mayo	471	296	46	24
Meath	363	245	35	23
Monaghan	415	281	41	16
Offaly	273	193	26	18
Roscommon	485	312	41	21
Sligo	178	115	21	12
Tipperary	945	750	176	147
Waterford	389	299	54	26
Westmeath	293	209	33	22
Wexford	509	390	55	26
Wicklow	184	124	13	8
Totals	11809	8414	1398	866

TAMS Applications

253. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an application for grant aid by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23483/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named applied for a TAMS grant under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme on 12 January 2017. The application has passed all administrative checks and has been forwarded to the local office for further technical checks. The local office will be in direct contact with the applicant to address any outstanding issues in relation to the application this week.

Compensation Schemes

254. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the case of persons in the Silvermines area of County Tipperary who have lost production due to residues; if compensation will be arranged to offset their significant losses until the problem is resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23512/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department continues to work with individual farmers in the area to assist with production issues and to tackle underlying problems on their farms. The Department understands that there has been a full resumption of milk deliveries from all of the farms concerned.

An Inter-Agency group will also review, and if deemed necessary revise the active management measures to be taken in the area in order to avoid problems such as those being experienced by the herdowners in the future.

GLAS Payments

255. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite the GLAS 2 payments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23519/17]

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

During the 2016 prepayment checking process issues were identified with the land parcel data required for the GLAS actions selected. Department officials are actively working to resolve these issues with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

Flood Relief Schemes

256. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the scheme operated by the Office of Public Works regarding flood relocation does not cover the relocation of farm operations (details supplied); and his plans to compensate farmers whose land has been severely affected by flooding in recent years. [23520/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief, Mr. Seán Canney T.D., recently announced the introduction of a once-off targeted Voluntary Homeowner Relocation Scheme.

As part of the announcement the Minister outlined that further examination is ongoing by the OPW, Local Authorities and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in evaluating, on an individual basis, if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect those at risk farm buildings that flooded again last Winter in order to inform the feasibility of any future once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation.

Coillte Teoranta

257. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Coillte-owned forestry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23528/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte CGA was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their lands, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that it erects fences around new plantations for as long as the young plants require protection from straying animals, which is usually for a period of four or five years. The company advise that the area to the north and to the east of this property, which is the subject of this question, was planted in 2001 and is now established and free growing, while the area to the west of this property is a commonage bog. The company suggests that, if the land owner makes direct contact with Coillte, a meeting can be arranged on site to look at the possibility of carrying out some works for a dyke along the boundary.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

258. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the deadline for knowledge transfer in view of the fact that the online system is not working to date (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23529/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have decided to extend the original 31 May deadline for Year 1 of Knowledge Transfer Groups until 31 July, 2017 to allow facilitators and farmers additional time to complete the requirements of the Knowledge Transfer Programme.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

259. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the 31 May 2017 deadline for the knowledge transfer programme to 30 June 2017; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a great deal of paperwork involved with the scheme and that Teagasc has not been given additional staff to deal with the volume of queries; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that there have been a number of technical issues with the scheme online when submitting details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23543/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €100m Knowledge Transfer Programme is included in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

I have announced that the original 31 May deadline for completion of Year 1 of the Knowledge Transfer Groups will be extended until 31 July, 2017 to allow facilitators and farmers additional time to complete the requirements of the Knowledge Transfer Programme.

Agricultural consultants acting as Knowledge Transfer Facilitators are paid €500 per group per participant for each year of the three year programme. This payment is based on the time each facilitator spends managing and attending group meetings as well as the time spent completing actions under the Farm Improvement Plan with individual farmers. It also includes a provision for administration work associated with running the group.

As regards Teagasc staffing, the agreed 2015 delegated sanction arrangements for Teagasc provide them with greater flexibility over staff appointments, subject to compliance with multi-annual pay ceilings. The arrangements enable Teagasc to replace staff when they retire and to make up to 90 new permanent appointments in the period to end 2017. While Teagasc must remain within its overall pay budget, the flexibility provided by the new arrangements allows them to fill critical vacancies and to react faster when such vacancies arise in the future. Within the parameters of that overarching policy, the question of allocating more resources to the Knowledge Transfer Programme is an operational matter for Teagasc management.

Officials at my Department acting on reports of difficulties with the online system for the Knowledge Transfer Programme Farm Improvement Plan have conducted a thorough investigation of the issue and have subsequently identified a solution which is currently being implemented.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

260. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has had their young farmers scheme 2015 application deemed ineligible; if same can be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23544/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulations governing the administration of the Young Farmers Scheme require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on farm inspections inspections, be completed to determine eligibility under the scheme.

The person named was selected for an inspection under the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme. The outcome of the inspection determined that the person named was not eligible for payment under the Scheme. The person named was notified of the inspection findings on 20 April 2017 and of their right to seek a review of the inspection outcome. To date no review request has been received, however my Department will now initiate a review on the basis of the information provided in the Deputy's question. In the event that additional information is required to complete the review Department officials will be in direct contact with the person named.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of any such review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

261. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will give consideration to a matter (details supplied) regarding the knowledge transfer programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23547/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A budget of €100m has been allocated to the Knowledge Transfer Programme for the duration of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Article 14 of EU Regulation 1305 of 2013 provides the funding basis for Knowledge Transfer Groups and allows member states to fund all or some of the costs incurred and income foregone by both farmers and facilitators. This is in addition to the benefits derived by farmers from the training provided under the Programme.

Costs for the programme are set out in Ireland's Rural Development Programme with the farmer payment of €750 per year based on the time spent attending meetings and preparing the Farm Improvement Plan as well as travel costs associated with attending each meeting.

The facilitator payment of €500 per farmer per year relates to time spent preparing for and delivering the Knowledge Transfer meetings and also reflects the one to one time spent with individual farmers preparing and completing their individualised Farm Improvement Plan. It also covers administrative costs associated with the operation of each group.

These payment rates are set following an extensive stakeholder consultation process and negotiation of the RDP with the EU Commission.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

262. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the research behind the claim that Ireland is recognised as having one of the most technologically advanced and carbon efficient food production systems; if there is a difference between the methane emissions of an Irish cow as opposed to non-Irish cows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23553/17]

263. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated methane emissions from the State's beef and dairy cattle; the projected methane emissions from same; if the objectives of Food Wise 2025 will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23554/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

The research the Deputy is asking about is the European Commission's JRC Report of 2010, titled "Evaluation of the livestock sector's contribution to the EU greenhouse gas emissions (GGELS)". That research recognised that Irish agricultural production has one of the lowest carbon footprints within the EU. Specifically in relation to cow milk emissions it found that Ireland (with Austria) had the lowest cow milk emissions (1 kg per kg of product). This compares with an EU average of 1.4kg/kg. The report also stated that Ireland had the lowest emissions per kg of pork (4.8 kg/kg) with the EU average 7.5kg/kg and Ireland's emissions per kg of beef were 18.4 kg/kg with and EU Average of 22.2kg/kg.

The Report also recognised that with regard to dairy systems in Europe, intensive systems create less methane and nitrous oxide emissions than extensive ones, but this is countered by higher emissions from land use and land use change. Lowest emissions are created by exten-

sive grassland systems, such as those in Ireland. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has also recognised the efficiency of our temperate grassland based production system.

Methane accounts for approximately 22% of Ireland's green house gas (GHG) emissions. It is the most significant GHG emitted from agricultural activity in Ireland accounting for 64.5% of total agricultural emissions. Enteric fermentation, which is a natural process in the digestive system of ruminant animals that results in the emission of methane, accounts for 90% of agricultural methane emissions. The remaining agricultural methane is associated with the storage and management of animal manures.

Current research into reducing methane emissions is primarily focussed on reducing emissions per unit product (i.e. reducing emissions intensity). This research is primarily focused on improving productivity per animal and thus decoupling animal numbers from production. Most of this research is focussed on developing economic breeding indices (EBI), extension of the grazing season, reducing beef finishing times (and reducing total methane per animal) and optimising beef and dairy animals via the use of sexed semen. Many of these measures are currently in use or being commenced.

Carbon audits by our Food Agency (An Bord Bia) are placing new emphasis on reduction in emissions intensity of beef and dairy produce.

Through the deployment of innovative and efficient practices at farm level, combined with the application of emerging scientific knowledge, Ireland can take the necessary steps towards addressing the challenge of greenhouse gas emissions, including methane, in the Irish agriculture sector. In the Rural Development Programme, there are some 38,000 farmers taking part in the Green Low carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) and 24,000 herds in the first Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP), which is a world-leading initiative to improve the quality of breeding of our beef cattle. Applications for participating in a new BDGP are currently being processed.

Food Wise 2025 is a cohesive, strategic plan for the sustainable development of agrifood sector over the next decade. The strategy identified over 400 recommendations to achieve the growth projections identified at the outset which the Agrifood Strategy Committee believed were achievable. Progress is reviewed on a quarterly basis by a High Level Implementation Committee. The first progress report Steps to Success outlined that good progress had been made in its first year. A second annual progress report is due to be produced shortly.

Departmental Staff Data

264. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the persons employed through agencies in his Department in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23938/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table:

No of Employees	Name of Agency
62	Farm Relief Services Network (FRS)
3	Irish Diagnostic Laboratory Services (IDLS)

Departmental Contracts Data

265. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations, including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23950/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An amount of €2647.50 was paid to date in 2017 in respect of all work contracted out under the aegis of my department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on during 2017.

Media Mergers

266. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 511 of 2 May 2017, if the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland has provided him with its report and recommendations on the proposed media merger involving the acquisition of sole control of a company (details supplied); if he will publish this report immediately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23377/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I received the report and recommendation from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland regarding the proposed media merger referred to by the Deputy on 9 May 2017.

In accordance with the relevant legislation I have 20 working days from the date of receipt of this report and recommendation within which I must make a final determination to allow the proposed media merger to proceed; to allow the proposed media merger to proceed with conditions; or to refuse to allow the proposed media merger to proceed. Therefore, the date by which I must make my determination is 6 June 2016.

In making this determination I shall have regard to this report and recommendation and a number of other matters detailed in the relevant legislation.

I shall publish, in accordance with the relevant legislation, my determination, the report and recommendation of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, and the opinion of the advisory panel when this process is concluded. The timescale within which these shall be published is prescribed in the legislation as being between 15 and 30 days after the date of my determination.

Departmental Expenditure

267. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form [23446/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has had no expenditure on renting car park spaces between 2011 and to date in 2017.

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

268. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23462/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Departmental Staff Data

269. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23941/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has not used agencies to employ staff.

Departmental Contracts Data

270. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23953/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): No external agencies or consultancies were used by my Department for industrial relations, hiring or interviewing. My Department uses the Public Appointments Service for external appointments.

Noise Pollution

271. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 10 May 2017, if he will meet with the group concerned or facilitate such a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23376/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand the Deputy is referring to the Community Liaison Group. As the Deputy is aware, I have already met a range of groups in relation to the North Runway Project. This has included representatives of St. Margaret's. I have no difficulty in meeting with this specific group.

However, given the on-going legal proceedings, the Deputy will appreciate that I will not be in a position to discuss any issues pertaining to those proceedings.

Cross-Border Projects

272. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if further discussions between the stakeholders regarding the Narrow Water Bridge project have taken place as was alluded to in a report of the North-South Ministerial Council in November 2016 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23395/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Fresh Start Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government agreed to undertake a review of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

As part of the ongoing work by both administrations on the options review, a series of discussions with stakeholders have been held by officials of my Department and the Department for Infrastructure in Northern with stakeholders, most recently on 20 February 2017 in Newry, Co Down. Following these discussions, I understand that it is intended that the North South Ministerial Council will consider a paper on the options for the project, taking account of key objectives, at its next meeting in Transport sectoral format.

Departmental Expenditure

273. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23458/17]

274. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23474/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273 and 274 together.

The Office of Public Works is responsible for the procurement of office (and other) accommodation required for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and accordingly the rental of car parking space is a matter for that Office.

The position regarding the bodies and agencies under the remit of this Department is a matter for them. I have forwarded a copy of your question to them for a direct reply. If you have not heard from the Agencies within ten working days, please contact my private office.

Taxi Licences

275. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person (details supplied) has to sit their taxi licence test for the tenth time after having passed both tests on different dates. [23518/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including administration of the SPSV Entry Test, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Departmental Expenditure

276. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent by her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23453/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Accommodation, including attendant car parking, for my Department, which is spread over a number of locations in Dublin as well as regionally, is provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in buildings which are either State owned or leased by the OPW on our behalf. All leasehold arrangements and payments are, accordingly, arranged and paid by the OPW and not by my Department.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

277. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23469/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Expenditure on car parking spaces by state agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for the agencies concerned and not one in which I have any function.

I have asked the agencies to provide me with details of any such expenditure and I will forward this to the Deputy once received.

IDA Site Visits

278. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits to County Kerry by prospective Industrial Development Agency Ireland companies in 2016; the details of these visits; her views on this level of visitation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23569/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am informed by IDA Ireland that there were three Agency sponsored site visits to Kerry in 2016. For reasons of client confidentiality, the Agency cannot make details of specific visits publicly available.

It is important to remember that the number of site visits to a particular county is not necessarily an accurate measure of the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) activity in the area. That is because approximately 70% of all FDI won by IDA Ireland comes from its existing client base, rather than new companies.

Although I am satisfied with the IDA's record results over the last number of years, both the Agency and I continue to work hard to increase the level of FDI in Ireland, especially in areas outside Dublin. Regional development remains a top priority and we are focused on continuing the good progress made in growing employment outside of our main urban areas. Last year, for example, over half of all jobs created by IDA Ireland's clients were based outside of Dublin.

This includes 186 new jobs created in Kerry in 2016.

Departmental Staff Data

279. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons that are employed under the aegis of her Department through agencies in the public sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23933/17]

280. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the persons employed through agencies in her Department, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23946/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 280 together.

There are currently no persons employed through agencies in my Department and its Offices.

Departmental Contracts Data

281. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23958/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Since taking Office, my Department as an employer has undertaken one investigation in the area of human resources and industrial relations. In this regard, the HR Unit of my Department is currently in the process of engaging an external agency to undertake an investigation under the Dignity at Work policy. As we are at an early stage in the contracting process the cost involved is not yet known.

In addition, as the Public Appointments Service provides my Department with its externally sourced/recruited staff and my Department manages its own internal recruitment processes itself without recourse to external agencies or consultancy, no monetary costs arise, per se.

Departmental Expenditure

282. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23445/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has not incurred any direct expenditure for the rental of car parking spaces since its establishment in June 2011. The lease for my Department's building and car park is held by the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

283. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of her Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23461/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Oberstown Children Detention Campus and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children are under the aegis of my Department.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Oberstown Children Detention Campus have confirmed that they have not incurred any expenditure for renting car parking spaces during the specified time period.

With regard to Tusla, the information sought by the Deputy is held regionally and is currently being compiled. I have asked Tusla to communicate directly with the Deputy when a full response is available.

I have requested the Ombudsman for Children's Office to respond to you directly on this issue as it is an independent statutory body established under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 and is directly accountable to the Oireachtas in relation to the exercising of its functions.

Child Care Services Provision

284. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the closure of a child care facility (details supplied); if she will engage with the Dublin City Childcare Committee to ensure that places are sourced for the children in question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23574/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware of the closure of The Nest in Drumcondra. Officials from my Department have made contact with the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) and are currently liaising with the DCCC in sourcing alternative provisions. The owner of this crèche confirmed that the service will remain open in its current manner until the end of June, and that they will be able to fulfil their ECCE contract. They are also making arrangements to provide care for all children that need it until the end of August.

While I find it unfortunate that The Nest has taken the decision to close this decision is a matter for the owner of the creche and as such the Department cannot intervene.

Departmental Staff Data

285. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons who are employed under the aegis of her Department through agencies in the public sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23927/17]

286. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the persons employed in her Department through agencies, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23940/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 285 and 286 together.

As the Deputy has not stipulated the period of time for which this information is required, I have taken 2017 as the year in question and I can confirm that the number of persons employed in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs through external recruitment agencies in 2017 is 'Nil'.

With regard to the four agencies under the aegis of my Department, the Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised that the number of persons employed by external recruitment agencies in their organisation in 2017 is 'Nil', while the Oberstown Children Detention Campus currently have 6 staff employed through external recruitment agencies.

The detailed information was not readily available from Tusla, and I've asked that they might correspond with you directly in this matter.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is independent in its function and reports to the Oireachtas on matters within its remit, as required by the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002.

I have forwarded the question to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and asked that they might correspond with you directly in this matter.

Departmental Contracts Data

287. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations, including hiring and interviewing staff and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23952/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In relation to my Department, I can confirm that the costs for work contracted out to external agencies and/or consultancy in 2017 is as follows:

Company Name	Subject	Cost in 2017
Carr Communications	Staff Development and Training	€1,450.00
Institute of Public Administration	Staff Development and Training	€4,349.99
TF Coaching, Training & Development Solutions	Staff Development and Training	€360
Total Cost		€6,159.99

The information requested in respect of the four agencies under the aegis of my Department is as follows:

(i) Investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations for the following:

-	Company	Subject	2017
Oberstown Children Detention Campus	Graphite HRM	Grievance	€1,854.00
Adoption Authority Ireland	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total Cost	-	-	€1,854.00

(ii) In respect of the provision of external expertise to interview boards and interviewees, the following costs were incurred:

Oberstown Children Detention Campus	Company Name	2017
	KFV Consulting	€3,190.00
	Positive Interventions	€1,103.44
	Dermot Walsh	€748.68
	Total Cost	€5,042.12
Adoption Authority Ireland	The HR Company	€3,000

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is independent in its function and reports to the Oireachtas on matters within its remit, as required by the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. I have forwarded the question to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and asked that they might correspond with you directly in this matter. My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Military Intelligence

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which military intelligence can be enhanced to deal with potential terrorist attacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23432/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence, published in the Autumn of 2015, considered the security environment, including the threat from terrorist attacks. It notes that the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for protecting the internal security of the State. The Defence Forces provide, on request, supports in aid to the civil power (ATCP) of an ongoing and contingent nature.

In this context, the security environment is kept under constant review. On-going coordination and liaison meetings take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and, based on on-going threat assessments, the Gardaí and the Defence Forces liaise with regard to possible Defence Forces supports required for a range of contingencies. In this context, I can confirm that there is very active cooperation between An Garda Síochána and Defence Forces.

The White Paper on Defence provides for the on-going development of military capabilities, having regard to the dynamic nature of the security environment.

Defence Forces Equipment

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied with the availability of equipment such as military hardware throughout all branches of the Defence Forces, with particular reference to meeting needs arising from modern challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23433/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

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

as part of the capability development and equipment planning priorities planning process.

In this regard, Budget 2017 secured a capital spending allocation of €74 million, representing an increase of €7 million on the 2017 Defence allocation contained in the 2016-21 capital investment programme. This allocation will facilitate the investment necessary to ensure that the Defence Forces have the equipment and infrastructure to deliver on all their roles as set out in the White Paper.

The Army will continue to retain all-arms conventional military capabilities, and the principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas. There is focus on the essential force protection provided by armoured vehicles, and in this regard a maintenance and upgrade programme has commenced for the current fleet of 80 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) which will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030. A small number of armoured logistical and utility vehicles are also being procured for force protection.

The White Paper provides that the Air Corps will see the Cessna fleet replaced with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The tender competition for the procurement of the three new aircraft has commenced with the recent publication of the Request for Tenders on the Etenders website and on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in accordance with national and EU procurement regulations.

The two CASA 235s Maritime Patrol Aircraft are due for replacement in 2019. The CASAs will be replaced with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft to enhance maritime surveillance and to provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

With regard to training aircraft, a decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft which was written off following a fatal crash in 2009. The replacement PC-9M aircraft, scheduled for delivery this year from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland will bring the fleet up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

The current Naval Service Ship replacement programme has already seen the replacement of three Naval Service vessels. The White Paper underpins the ongoing replacement of the Naval Service fleet. An agreement was reached in June 2016 for the provision of an additional ship for the Naval Service to be built to the same specifications as the three newest vessels. This ship is scheduled for delivery next year. Future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capability requirements.

I am satisfied that the current provisions, together with the courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces is suitably equipped, in line with international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government and to meet and deal with the needs from modern challenges.

Air Corps Equipment

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that all equipment available to the Air Corps, including aircraft and communications technology, is adequately upgraded and updated in accordance with international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23434/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces, including the Air Corps, is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable them to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

Future equipment priorities for the Air Corps are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process.

The White Paper provides that the Air Corps will see the Cessna fleet replaced with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The tender competition for the procurement of the three new aircraft has now commenced with the recent publication of the Request for Tenders on the Etenders website and on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in accordance with national and EU procurement regulations.

With regard to training aircraft, a decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft which was written off following a fatal crash in 2009. The replacement PC-9M aircraft, scheduled for delivery this year from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland at a cost of €5m plus VAT, will bring the fleet up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

The White Paper also provides for the replacement of the two CASA 235s Maritime Patrol Aircraft by 2019, with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft. This would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

I am satisfied that the current procurements of aircraft as outlined together with the planned courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Air Corps is suitably equipped, in line with international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

Naval Service Equipment

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that all equipment available to the Naval Service, including sea going vessels and communications technology, is adequately upgraded and updated in accordance with international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23435/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The acquisition of new equipment and equipment upgrades for the Defence Forces remains a focus for me as Minister with Responsibility for Defence. I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have a modern and effective range of equipment which is line with best international standards, as required to fulfil all roles that are assigned to them by Government.

The future equipment priorities for the Defence Forces, including the Naval Service, are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence.

The current Naval Service ship replacement programme has seen the delivery of three new Naval Service vessels in recent years. In June 2016, agreement was reached with Babcock International for the provision of an additional ship for the Naval Service to be built in their facility in Appledore, Devon. This ship will be the same class as the three newest vessels, LÉ Samuel Beckett which was commissioned in 2014, LÉ James Joyce which was commissioned in 2015, and LÉ William Butler Yeats which was commissioned in October 2016. Delivery of the fourth ship is expected next year.

The White Paper also recognises the requirement to maintain and upgrade vessels having regard to emerging operational requirements and changes in technology, including communications equipment and technology. As such, future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capability requirements.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of promotional positions waiting to be filled throughout the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23436/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, as at 31 March 2017 was 9,072 personnel, comprising 7,297 Army, 708 Air Corps and 1,067 Naval Service, whole time equivalent.

The following table outlines the establishment, strength and vacancies of the Permanent Defence Force, by Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as at 31 March 2017, based on the agreed stabilised strength for the Permanent Defence Force of 9,500.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services.

In this regard, promotions are ongoing within the Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies. A new NCO promotion competition, to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above, has been launched. Promotions from the Order of Merit Lists from this competition will commence in Q3 2017.

It is my intention that promotions will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

-	Lt Gen	Maj Gen	Brig Gen	Col	Lt Col	Comdt	Capt	Lt	SM	BQ MS	CS	CQ MS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte/Cadet
Army Rank Establishment	1	2	6	3 4	110	257	306	167	29	32	115	169	973	1,438	3,880
Army Strength	1	2	6	3 4	101	250	255	159	26	30	91	152	834	1,344	4,012*
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	9	7	51	8	3	2	24	17	139	94	-132
Air Corps Rank Establishment	0	0	1	3	14	36	65	48	8	4	56	14	131	183	324
Air Corps Strength	0	0	1	3	12	33	47	22	7	3	53	11	108	151	257 *
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	2	3	18	26	1	1	3	3	23	32	67
Naval Service Rank Establishment	0	0	1	2	13	45	81	41	6	7	75	15	226	180	402

Naval Service Strength	0	0	1	2	13	51	49	34	6	7	66	13	169	130	526 *
Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	0	-6	32	7	0	0	9	2	57	50	-124
Total Vacancies by Rank	0	0	0	0	11	4	101	41	4	3	36	22	219	176	-189

* Figures include 80 Army Cadets, 28 Air Corps Cadets and 22 Naval Service Cadets.

There are an additional 79 personnel on career breaks/secondment, who are not included in the strengths in the above table.

Note: Equivalent Naval Service Ranks - Brigadier General/Commodore; Colonel/Captain; Lieutenant Colonel/Commander; Commandant/Lieutenant Commander; Captain/Lieutenant(NS); Lieutenant/Sub Lieutenant; Sergeant Mayor/Warrant Officer; Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Chief Petty Officer; Company Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Petty Officer; Company Sergeant/Chief Petty Officer; Sergeant/Petty Officer; Corporal/Leading Seaman; Private/Able Seaman.

Overseas Missions Data

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of the Defence Forces currently serving overseas at all ranks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23437/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 04 May 2017, Ireland is contributing 575 Defence Forces personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations.

The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 369 personnel and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 136 personnel.

The current contribution of some 575 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in the area of international peace and security.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas

As of 4th May 2017

1. UN MISSIONS

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

UNIFIL 109th Infantry Battalion - 331

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

(ii) UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel & Syria - 2

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

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

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

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 55th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) - 130

TOTAL - 524

UN MANDATED MISSIONS

(vi) EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 5

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

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

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 559

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

(i) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina - 1

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

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 2

3. EU MILITARY STAFF

Brussels - 4

4. MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF

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

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

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

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

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

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

**TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS
- 575**

The above figure represents 135 Officers, 226 Non Commissioned Officers and 214 Privates.

Defence Forces Deployment

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which further overseas deployment of the Defence Forces with the UN is envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23438/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 04 May 2017, Ireland is contributing 575 Defence Forces personnel to 9 different missions throughout

the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations.

The main UN missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 369 personnel and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 136 personnel.

Ireland has a long and continuous record of contributing to peacekeeping missions, both UN led and UN mandated. Participation in these missions demonstrates Ireland's strong support for the role of the United Nations in international peacekeeping. The current contribution of some 575 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in this area.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. As the Deputy will be aware, the Naval Service vessel, LÉ Eithne with a crew of 72 personnel, will soon deploy to the Mediterranean to undertake humanitarian search and rescue operations, which will further increase the numbers serving overseas.

With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis. My Department, on an ongoing basis also reviews in consultation with the military authorities, existing deployments and also other UN mandated missions. Following recent government approval, the number of Irish personnel deployed to EUTM Mali will increase from 18 to 20 personnel in the near future. At this point in time, however, deployment of Defence Forces personnel to new missions is not currently envisaged.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are listed as follows.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas As of 4th May 2017

1. UN MISSIONS

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

UNIFIL 109th Infantry Battalion - 331

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

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

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

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

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

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 55th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) - 130

TOTAL - 524

UN MANDATED MISSIONS

(vi) EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 5

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

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

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 559

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

(i) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina - 1

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

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 2

3. EU MILITARY STAFF

Brussels - 4

4. MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS - 575.

Defence Forces Funding

295. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the budget available to his Department remains sufficient to meet requirements in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23439/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The total gross budget allocation for the Defence and Army Pensions Votes in 2017 is over €921 million. This allocation provides for the pay and allowances of over 10,400 public service employees (including 9,500 members of the Permanent Defence Force), ongoing Defence Forces standing and operational costs and also facilitates investment in essential equipment and infrastructure. It also provides for the payment of pension entitlements to former members of the Defence Forces.

The budget allocation allows the Defence Forces to deliver on all their assigned roles, both at home and overseas, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Defence Forces Training

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the degree to which the most modern training methods remain available to the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23440/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to enable it to fulfil the roles laid down by Government.

The Defence Forces conducts training and education under four broad categories namely; leadership, skills, career and collective training. Leadership training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensures that personnel are prepared for exercising command authority across the full range of military functions both at home and overseas in international operations. Skills training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensures that its personnel have the requisite individual, specialist, and crew skills. Career training and education provides the organisation with the necessary pool of leaders and commanders at all levels. Collective training allows military personnel to use their individual, crew, specialist and career training together, to develop integrated and coherent combat forces.

The scheduling of training in the Defence Forces is underpinned by an analysis of training needed to meet operational output requirements and capability development needs. A long term strategy is adopted with current planning horizons out to 2021.

The Defence Forces seek to constantly benchmark training across all three arms against best military and academic practice. Military best practice is ensured by implementing a policy of standardisation that is in line with EU and NATO/ Partnership for Peace partners. Academic best practice is ensured by benchmarking courses through accreditation under the National Framework of Qualifications which is validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

The Defence Forces delivers military programmes and modules meeting national and international standards. The Defence Forces also engages with external educational institutions in order to facilitate organisational learning. This engagement with national and international educational institutions, military and civilian, aims to ensure that the Defence Forces retains currency with regards to best international practice and employs all relevant modern training methods. I am committed to ensuring that the personnel of the Defence Forces continue to be trained to best international standards.

Defence Forces Strength

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of the Defence Forces including Reserves, Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; the number of women in each branch of the services; the likelihood of recruitment and replacements following retirements in 2017 and over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23441/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The table sets out the strength of the Defence Forces, as of 31 March, 2017 (the latest date for which figures are available), as requested by the Deputy.

Service	Current Strength	No. of Females
Army	7,297 (Whole time equivalent)	477
Naval Service	1,069 (Whole time equivalent)	60
Air Corps	708 (Whole time equivalent)	33
Total(PDF)	9,072	570

Reserve	1,975 (Effective)	28 0
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The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

On an ongoing basis, the manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. As with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel in particular areas of expertise. I am advised by the Military Authorities that a total of 590 General Service Recruits were enlisted into the Permanent Defence Force in 2016, of which 501 Recruits were enlisted in the Army and 89 Recruits were enlisted in the Naval Service. In addition, 100 Cadetships were awarded following the 2016 Cadetship Competitions.

I am advised by the military authorities that their planned target is to induct approximately 850 new entrants to the Defence Forces across all services and competition streams in 2017.

A new General Service Recruitment campaign was launched on 23 February 2017 and the 2017 Cadetship competition was launched in March 2017. Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. An Air Corps apprentice class was also inducted in March 2017.

Promotions are ongoing within Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies. A new NCO promotions competition to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above has been launched from which promotions will commence in Q3 2017.

I remain committed to increasing recruitment to the Defence Forces and it is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence and in the context of the policy and strategy regarding recruitment set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Departmental Expenditure

298. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent by his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23447/17]

299. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23463/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 298 and 299 together.

There was no expenditure by my Department or bodies and agencies under the aegis of my Department on renting car park spaces in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

Departmental Staff Data

300. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons that are employed under the aegis of his Department through agencies in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23928/17]

301. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the persons employed through agencies in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23942/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Question Nos. 300 and 301 together.

My Department employs 14 persons through agencies to provide support services to the Defence Forces. These are the only persons employed by my Department or the Defence Forces through the use of agencies.

Departmental Contracts Data

302. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancy for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23954/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Payments made to external agencies in the human resources and industrial relations areas for the Department of Defence in the period since 6 May 2016 is €9,384.25. In addition, from time to time, my Department will engage individuals to serve on interview boards.

