

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.

Banking Sector Regulation

11. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the Central Bank's response to a bank's (details supplied) placing of 2,141 SME customers into a bank; his views on whether a formal review is required by the Central Bank to assess whether SME customers here were inappropriately treated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23534/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank that, while it cannot generally comment on interactions with regulated firms, Ulster Bank Ireland D.A.C. is engaging with the Bank in relation to this matter.

As the Deputy is aware, in November 2016, RBS announced a new complaints review process overseen by an independent third party and the automatic refund of complex fees to SME customers in the Global Restructuring Group (GRG) in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland between 2008 and 2013. In the intervening period, Ulster Bank has been working on how it can provide the support to its customers in the Republic of Ireland. Ulster Bank have commenced sending letters to SME customers in GRG between 2008 and 2013 at the end of February 2017 to let them know about the new GRG complaints review process and if they are included in the automatic complex fee refund. Ulster Bank has indicated that a large proportion of their customers have now been contacted.

Ulster Bank has stated that answers to a wide range of frequently asked questions (FAQs) that should address many customer queries can be found on their website. A telephone contact number is also available for customers.

I am confident that legislative changes since the financial crisis have equipped the Central Bank with an array of investigative, regulatory and enforcement powers to ensure that regulated financial service providers adhere to the requirements of financial services legislation. These changes include significantly enhanced powers for the Central Bank to gather information under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 which broadened the Banks' information gathering and authorised officer powers.

It is evident that the Central Bank is properly undertaking its enforcement role by the recent sizeable settlements in enforcement cases.

In addition to this enforcement role, the Deputy may be aware that the Central Bank is pro-

actively regulating the financial system and has issued regulations aimed at protecting SMEs when dealing with regulated and unregulated firms as set out below. These strengthened regulations include the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation for regulated lenders (other than credit unions) on 1 July 2016 and, in the case of credit unions, on 1 January 2017. These revised SME Regulations introduce specific requirements for regulated lenders, including:

- Contacting SME borrowers who have been in arrears for 15 working days;
- Warning SME borrowers if they are in danger of being classified as not co-operating; and
- Expanding the grounds for appeal and setting up an internal appeals panel.

Under these SME Regulations, regulated financial services firms must have a complaints handling procedure in place. Any complaints against financial institutions should first be discussed with the institution concerned.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

12. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the favourable tax treatment for real estate investment trusts and Irish real estate funds in view of reports that these are a factor in increasing house prices (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23360/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A Real Estate Investment Trust or REIT is a quoted company, used as a collective investment vehicle to hold rental property. A REIT is exempt from corporation tax on qualifying income and gains from rental property, subject to a high profit distribution requirement to. A REIT provides the same after-tax returns to investors as direct investment in rental property, by eliminating the double layer of taxation at corporate and shareholder level which would otherwise apply.

In the 2016 Finance Act I introduced the Irish Real Estate Fund or IREF. The legislation was introduced to address concerns raised regarding the use of collective investment vehicles by non-resident investors to invest in Irish property. IREFs must deduct a 20% withholding tax on certain property distributions to non-resident investors.

I am of the view that the taxation regimes remain appropriate for these entities. As the REIT regime is designed to prevent a double layer of taxation and the IREF regime is designed to protect the State's taxing rights over property, neither of these are favourable tax regimes nor is there an evidential link between these tax regimes and house price increases.

My Department continues to monitor developments in the housing market, including residential property prices, on an ongoing basis. The current inflationary pressure in the residential market reflects an insufficient supply response to meet the current demographic demand for housing. To address this imbalance the outstanding bottlenecks in the housing market need to be tackled.

In order to restore the housing market to a sustainable equilibrium the Government, as part of *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*, has set out a comprehensive package of 113 actionable measure across five key pillars namely Address Homelessness, Accelerate Social Housing, Build More Homes, Improve the Rental sector, and utilise Existing Housing. These measures should help to improve the viability of construction and encourage

the development of affordable residential developments.

Central Bank of Ireland Supervision

13. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank will take particular steps to soften the manner in which original or secondary lenders treat home borrowers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23571/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Within the remit of the Central Bank's responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears is a key part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework in this regard. Banks, retail credit firms and credit servicing firms servicing loans on behalf of unregulated loan owners are all required to comply with the CCMA. The overriding objective of the CCMA is to ensure the fair and transparent treatment of consumers in mortgage arrears or pre-arrears, and that due regard is had to the fact that each case of mortgage arrears is unique and needs to be considered on its own merits.

Last year I wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank to request that an assessment be undertaken of the range of available sustainable restructure solutions offered by banks and non-bank entities. The Central Bank completed its assessment and their report is published on the Department of Finance website. The assessment finds a comprehensive range of available restructuring solutions being offered and delivered by both bank and non-bank entities and notes considerable progress in addressing mortgage arrears since the peak. The Central Bank notes further that there is strong evidence that both banks and non-banks look to exhaust available restructure options before moving to the legal process. In addition, the Central Bank considers the range of restructures offered by banks to be broadly appropriate in balancing consumer protection imperatives, and maintaining a mortgage market for all borrowers, and a functioning banking system.

In referring to "secondary lenders", the Deputy may be talking about funds to whom loans are sold. He will be aware that the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 was enacted in July 2015. It was introduced by the previous Government to fill the consumer protection gap where loans were sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. The Act introduced a regulatory regime for a new type of entity called a 'credit servicing firm'. Credit Servicing Firms are now subject to the provisions of Irish financial services law that apply to 'regulated financial service providers'.

Under the Act, purchasers of loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm that is regulated by the Central Bank. Relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears). It is also important to highlight that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower's rights and obligations under the original contract.

My Department will continue to keep all relevant legislation under review in order to ensure that borrowers whose loans have been sold are properly protected and do not lose any protections that they previously enjoyed. In addition, I expect that the Central Bank, as regulator of

credit servicing firms, will be vigilant in this area and raise any specific instances where they have found consumers have not had their protections upheld or that their positions have been disadvantaged.

Central Bank of Ireland Supervision

14. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if section 33AT (1) of Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942 has been amended in subsequent finance legislation; if not, his plans to amend or remove that specific section which related to sanctions for criminal offences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23367/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank's Administrative Sanctions Procedure is governed by Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942. Part IIIC was inserted into the Central Bank Act, 1942, by the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act, 2004. It provides the Central Bank with the power to administer sanctions in respect of the commission of prescribed contraventions by regulated financial service providers and by persons presently or formerly concerned in their management.

Section 33AT (1) of Part IIIC provides that no criminal prosecution may be brought against a financial service provider or person concerned in the management of a financial service provider, if the prescribed contravention in question has already been the subject of an Inquiry under the Administrative Sanctions Procedure which led to the imposition of a monetary penalty.

Section 33AT (2) provides that where a criminal prosecution has been brought in respect of an offence that also involves a prescribed contravention, and the regulated entity or person is found either guilty or not guilty, then no monetary penalty may be imposed pursuant to the Administrative Sanctions Procedure.

In circumstances where both the Administrative Sanctions Procedure and summary criminal prosecution are available, the Central Bank will consider the circumstances of each case on its merits before deciding which avenue to pursue. Furthermore, in deciding whether or not to pursue criminal proceedings, the Central Bank will have regard to the Director of Public Prosecution's "Guidelines for Prosecutors".

Section 33AT does not preclude the Central Bank from following other non-monetary avenues within the Administrative Sanctions Procedure, including issuing a caution or reprimand, a direction ordering the financial service provider or person to cease participating in the commission of the contravention, or the suspension or revocation of regulatory authorisation. Neither does it absolve the Bank from the obligation to refer the matter to the relevant authority, including An Garda Síochána, where appropriate.

Section 33AT upholds the principle of *ne bis in idem*, also known as double jeopardy, which is deemed a constitutional and procedural right, and which provides that a person cannot be prosecuted more than once for the same offence. Accordingly, I have no plans to amend or remove this specific provision.

NAMA Loans Sale

15. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 3 May 2017, if Project Shift was discussed at NAMA Northern Ireland advisory committee meetings; if a person (details supplied) advised the debtor in question involved with

Project Shift; if Project Shift was externally valued; when it was decided by NAMA to change it from an asset sale to a loan sale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23361/17]

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 3 May 2015, the number of the 117 prospective investors approached by the loan sale adviser that had originally approached the debtor expressing an interest in the portfolio; if any of these investors were one of the 12 that submitted first round offers or one of the eight invited into the second round of bidding on Project Shift; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23362/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 15 together.

The Deputy will be aware that Section 9 of the NAMA Act provides that NAMA is independent in the performance of its functions and that, under Section 10 of the Act, its primary objective is to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State from its acquired loan portfolio. In this regard, I am advised that NAMA is confident it upheld its mandate in the Project Shift transaction.

The Project Shift sale comprised a portfolio of German property assets held by a Northern Ireland based debtor. I am advised that the marketing process for Project Shift began in June 2013 as an asset sale being conducted by the debtor with NAMA's consent. This was in advance of NAMA's decision in January 2014 to place the Project Eagle loan portfolio on the market for sale. I am advised that updated valuations for the assets comprising the Project Shift portfolio were secured by NAMA as part of the due diligence process.

As I stated in my reply of 3 May 2017, NAMA, on the advice of Savills, the debtor's sales advisor, consented to the debtor entering into exclusive discussions with Cerberus which had submitted the highest bid after an open, transparent and competitive asset sale process. However, the Project Shift asset sale did not complete prior to Cerberus being selected as the preferred bidder for the Project Eagle loan portfolio sale. Given that Cerberus was the ultimate purchaser for both Project Shift and Project Eagle, it made sense to change the Project Shift asset sale to complete as a loan sale and thereby complete the disposal of all of the debtor's loans to Cerberus. I am advised that Cerberus and NAMA agreed to convert Project Shift into a loan sale after the NAMA Board selected Cerberus in April 2014 as its preferred bidder for Project Eagle.

I am further advised that the debtor's sale advisor approached some 117 prospective investors and that 12 investors submitted first round offers within the relevant bid deadline. I am advised that NAMA, acting on the advice of the debtor's sales advisor, Savills, consented to them inviting eight investors into a second round of bidding. The eight investors were provided with access to a detailed electronic data room to carry out further due diligence. I am further advised by NAMA that seven of the eight shortlisted investors submitted second round offers by the bid date for this transaction.

The Deputy has sought information on the number of the 117 prospective investors who had originally approached the debtor to express an interest in the portfolio, if any of these investors were one of the 12 that submitted first round offers or one of the eight invited into the second round of bidding.

The information sought by the Deputy can only be confirmed by the debtor who may have been approached in the context of the Project Shift asset sale. Given that NAMA no longer has an active engagement with the debtor, NAMA is not in a position to provide the information requested.

In case there is any misunderstanding or apprehension that contact between potential purchasers and the NAMA debtor was inappropriate in this instance, given that Project Shift was initially marketed as an asset sale, there is no reason why investors should not have approached the debtor, who owned the assets, to indicate their interest in purchasing some or all of the assets.

Finally, I am advised that Project Shift was not discussed at meetings of the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee. NAMA is not in a position to establish whether the person to whom the Deputy refers advised the debtor in relation to Project Shift.

Financial Services Regulation

16. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has given consideration to the need to establish a code of conduct on mortgage switching, similar to the code of conduct on the switching of payment accounts with payment service providers, in view of the recent research undertaken by the Central Bank on mortgage switching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23531/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government considers that measures to encourage and promote a greater level of switching in the mortgage market would help boost the level of competition in the market for existing mortgages. In particular, the Programme for Partnership Government considers that the development of a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider would be a useful and practical initiative which would have the potential to deliver savings to many existing mortgage holders.

To that end, in 2016 the Central Bank commenced research in the area of mortgage switching which was completed by early 2017. The results of this research, which was published last month, will be used to consider the further particular measures to be advanced in this area. The Central Bank, in its Consumer Protection Outlook Report as published in February 2017, stated that it would bring forward any proposals for consultation based on these research findings. The Central Bank will, therefore, publish a consultation paper in Q3 2017 which will propose additional measures to facilitate mortgage switching for those consumers minded to switch.

This continues the Central Bank's work to maintain a strong consumer protection framework for mortgage borrowers. It builds on new Consumer Protection Code measures which came into effect on 1 February and which are aimed at enhancing transparency and facilitating consumer choice for variable rate mortgage holders.

Universal Social Charge Yield

17. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the under-performance of USC in the January to February period of 2017; the difference in the projected and actual intake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23363/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset it is important to point out that income tax encompasses a broad range of elements, some of which are not directly impacted by employment or wage developments. These include Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Life Assurance Exit Tax, Dividend Withholding Tax, Professional Services Withholding Tax and Back Duty. These payments can be non-linear in nature and the timing of payments can vary from year to year.

18 May 2017

Overall income tax receipts to the end of February were €123 million below profile. The Revenue Commissioners have indicated that lower than expected receipts from Life Assurance Exit Tax and Universal Social Charge (USC) account for over half of this shortfall and that PAYE, the main component of income tax, was broadly in-line with profile and up 7% year-on-year, which is consistent with the improving labour market.

Notwithstanding this, the performance of USC was lower-than-expected by just over €50 million according to the Revenue Commissioners. My Department is currently reviewing its performance, in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners and the initial indications are that the Revenue Commissioners are satisfied that the overall estimate of the Budget 2017 USC changes of €335 million in 2017 was costed accurately.

However, at the time of Budget 2017, the apportionment of the total USC package between PAYE and Schedule D was expected to be €263 million and €72 million respectively, in line with previous norms. However, subsequent analysis by Revenue, indicates that the allocation of the USC package between PAYE and Schedule D should have been €311 million and €24 million respectively, due to the dynamics of the USC package. While, this helps to explain some of the current under-performance of USC against profile, it is important to point out that this reapportionment should have no adverse impact on the overall collection of USC receipts as this should equalize later in the year when self-employed returns are made.

In addition, as part of the continuous efforts to improve the Department's tax forecasting performance, joint research conducted by the ESRI and Department examined the sensitivity of income tax and USC revenues to changes in income. As a result of this work published in March, my Department has revised the elasticities used in the forecasting of USC, which will affect these forecasts from 2018 onwards.

However, my Department along with the Revenue Commissioners will continue to examine this issue and consider all relevant developments. In this regard, the Deputy should note the USC from PAYE taxpayers came in much closer to profile in March and April, albeit still a little below expectations.

Since its introduction in 2011, USC has undergone many alterations including rate and threshold changes. As the public finances have improved in recent years, progress has been made in reducing the USC charge, particularly for low to middle income earners. Budget 2017 has, for the third year in succession, introduced reductions in the income tax burden for all those within the scope of USC. The three lowest rates of USC were reduced 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. As the Deputy will appreciate, considering the magnitude of these recent changes, it has made the USC more difficult to forecast.

Finally, it should be noted that we were in a similar position at the end of the first quarter in 2016 when income tax was down 3.4% against profile. However, due to a pick-up in receipts throughout the remainder of last year, income tax finished 2016 ahead of target.

National Debt Servicing

18. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to refinance a quarter of the State's national debt between October 2017 and October 2020; and the steps being taken by the NTMA to minimise the risks to the State in this period of great economic uncertainty. [18352/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have outlined in my previous re-

sponses to the Deputy's recent questions on this topic – PQ 16418/17 and PQ 18095/17 – I am confident that the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) is pursuing the optimal strategy in its management of this debt.

The NTMA has already taken numerous steps to significantly reduce the refinancing requirement in the coming years.

It continues to pre-fund ahead of future obligations and to build up significant cash balances. These balances stood at over €15.5 billion at end-April meaning that in effect the October 2017 bond redemption has already been funded. It expects to enter 2018 with approximately €10 billion in cash balances.

It has executed bilateral bond switches – redeeming early short-term bonds in exchange for longer-term bonds – and reduced the bond refinancing requirement by over €2.5 billion.

It has taken advantage of the opportunities presented by lower borrowing costs and actively lengthened the maturity of Ireland's debt. The result is that today Ireland has one of the longest average public debt maturities in Europe.

The NTMA has also accelerated the buy-back of the Floating Rate Notes. While this doesn't reduce the refinancing requirement in the short-to-medium term, it is locking in the current low market interest rates. In effect, the NTMA is taking out insurance against rates rising into the future.

The net impact of all the actions by the NTMA, including the early repayment of over €18 billion of IMF loans, has been to reduce the size of the refinancing obligation over the period out to the end of 2020 from €70 billion to closer to €40 billion, when account is taken of cash balances.

I am satisfied that the steps taken by the NTMA leave the Exchequer in a healthy position to fund the refinancing requirement over the period October 2017 to October 2020.

Question No. 19 answered with Question No. 8.

Fiscal Policy

20. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request flexibility with regard to the fiscal rules in view of the well documented impact of Brexit on the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23358/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is no doubt aware and, as I have previously outlined for the Deputy in Parliamentary Question Number 43 of 4 April this year, the fiscal rules to which Ireland is subject to have direct application through a number of EU regulations. The European Commission has repeatedly emphasised that budgetary discipline is assessed against reference values that do not differentiate amongst different types of expenditure as any deficit-financed expenditure must be repaid through future taxes. Furthermore, granting special treatment to certain kinds of public expenditures could create incentives for creative accounting.

The Commission's guidance on the implementation of the 'unusual event clause' in the preventative arm of the Stability and Growth pact (SGP) allows for exceptional spending directly linked to unusual events outside of the control of Government, if this spending does not endanger fiscal sustainability in the medium term. This clause is granted on the basis of individual case-by-case assessments and, to date, has only been granted to six Member States in light of

refugee-related costs and three Member States following submissions based upon security-related expenditure. It should also be noted that any Member State availing of this clause must still meet their SGP obligations when the additional spending on the unusual event provided for in the clause is excluded.

Accordingly, any application for leniency under this clause would require that Ireland demonstrate that the British exit from the EU has had a “major impact on the financial position of the general government”. Notwithstanding the fact that the sharp appreciation of the euro-sterling bilateral rate has been the most immediate impact from Brexit and is one of the principal factors behind the decline in the value of merchandise exports to the UK last year, no material impact on Ireland’s general government balance has been observed to date. This is not surprising given that the negotiation on the terms of the UK exit have yet to commence in substance and will not conclude until 2019.

Nonetheless Ireland is currently exploring existing and possible future EU measures that could potentially assist Ireland in mitigating the effects of the UK’s withdrawal on specific Irish businesses and economic sectors. Ireland will also, in light of developments, continue to make a strong case at EU level that the UK’s withdrawal represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy overall and that we will require support.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 7.

Banking Sector

22. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when he and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will bring forward firm proposals for community banking in view of the recent public consultation on such banking models; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23366/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to thoroughly investigate the Sparkassen model of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is the lead Department in respect of this commitment. The Government is also committed to consider a model of community banking that could provide a suite of banking services through the Post Office Network, similar to the Kiwibank model in New Zealand.

The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, with the assistance of my Department, undertook a consultation process, engaging with stakeholders and interested parties, that finished on 29th of March of this year. This consultation involved holding meetings with interested parties including Sparkassen, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland who put forward proposals for community banking in Ireland.

Officials from both Departments are working to prepare a report for the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and myself. It is anticipated that this report will be completed by the end of the first half of this year. This report will set out the findings and conclusions of the investigation of the Sparkassen model of local public banking.

Tax Credits

23. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a report on the large levels of tax expenditures relating to research and development tax credits each

year since 2010; if his Department carries out regular cost-benefit analyses on this level of expenditure and revenue foregone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18345/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In 2014 the Department of Finance published Tax Expenditure Guidelines to provide direction for evaluating large tax expenditures on a regular basis. The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure the evaluation of tax expenditures in the context of their continued relevance in respect of achieving their policy objective.

In line with these guidelines, an economic evaluation of the R&D Tax Credit was completed in October 2016. This report was published with Budget 2017 and is available on the Budget 2017 website.

The evaluation used a randomised control trial framework. This approach is considered to be more robust than simply asking firms to estimate the amount of R&D they conduct due to the tax credit. The evidence from the evaluation indicates that the R&D Tax Credit is responsible for 60% more R&D being conducted that would be the case if there was no R&D tax credit in place. This is considered to be a reasonable level of additionality.

Furthermore, from a cost perspective the R&D Tax Credit provides a ‘bang for buck’ ratio of 2.4. This means that for every one euro in foregone revenue to the state, €2.40 of additional R&D is being conducted. Again, this was considered to be a reasonable result.

Overall, the evaluation found that the R&D Tax Credit fares well on a comparative basis. For example, older studies of public business grants to firms found evidence of additionality as low as 20% and in a recent evaluation of the Norwegian R&D tax credit, additionality was found to be 60% or lower.

The Department had previously reviewed the R&D Tax Credit in 2014 and found that the credit also stood up well in international comparisons at this time.

While there has been an increase in the cost of the R&D tax credit since 2010, last year’s evaluation provides evidence that the tax credit is effective in achieving its policy objective of increased R&D expenditure among firms. Nevertheless, my Department and I are conscious of the need to evaluate large tax expenditures, including the R&D Tax Credit, on a regular basis and will continue to do so in line with the Tax Expenditure Guidelines and best practice.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

24. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of lending carried out by a company (details supplied) to date in 2017 to the construction sector; his views on whether the State can do more to ensure the construction sector has access to finance to build the required homes and office accommodation around the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23533/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), in line with its double bottom line mandate, has to date invested in a number of significant financing platforms and projects in the construction sector, and is actively examining other investment opportunities.

ISIF invests on a risk adjusted basis in the various housing financing platforms and these platforms, in turn, provide finance, also on a risk adjusted basis, to developers, which can be equity or debt according to the business model of each platform. The interest rate applied to any individual debt financing arrangement therefore relates to the level of risk and other investment

factors in the underlying housing development proposal.

ISIF has total investment commitments to housing investment vehicles of €404 million comprising €325 million in Activate Capital, €25 million in the Ardstone Residential Partnership and €54 million to student accommodation in DCU. In addition ISIF has committed €125 million in total to more general real estate investment vehicles, including €75 million to the Wilbur Ross Cardinal Commercial Real Estate Mezzanine Debt Fund and €50 million to Quadrant Real Estate Advisors, both of which to date have completed some investment in housing. Through these ISIF-supported projects, a total of 8,400 housing units is expected to be delivered in the near term (a small portion of which has already been delivered).

In addition, ISIF's current near term pipeline of potential housing projects including in the build-to-rent sector and off-campus student accommodation as well as a smaller project that may have the ability to deliver some affordable housing, indicates potential to deliver a further 8,700 units in total.

The principal residential development finance lending vehicle which ISIF has invested in to date is Activate Capital.

ISIF is also examining the feasibility of establishing, in conjunction with the private sector, a Housing Investment Fund which would be capable of funding the delivery of substantial new mixed-tenure residential developments, comprising social and private housing, in a way that is both off-balance sheet and commercially viable. Engagement with a wide array of key stakeholders in both the public and private sector, including with Eurostat, is ongoing and involves the input of relevant Government departments, the CSO and others.

In the area of financing infrastructure which enables residential development, ISIF is seeking to structure solutions for a number of opportunities with a focus on sites of scale and strategic importance. ISIF is seeking to work alongside other sources of funding including LIHAF (Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund), Local Authority resources and commercial investment. A private sector pilot project (totalling approximately 3,000 units) is actively being progressed by ISIF. Public sector projects (also totalling approximately 3,000 units) are currently being considered – the extent to which these projects can be progressed will in part depend on whether LIHAF or other forms of financing can be leveraged to complement ISIF financing.

These ISIF actions demonstrate the substantial State commitment to assisting the construction sector to access finance. I am fully conscious that these measures must be carefully balanced by monitoring their impact to ensure that State actions are not exposing the State's balance sheet to excessive risk.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

25. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the first time buyers grant is having a destructive impact on the private housing market and leading to massive inflationary pressures in the price of homes. [17418/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Help to Buy incentive was initially announced on 19 July 2016 as part of 'Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'. This plan contains a significant volume of responses to the current housing crisis, of which the HTB incentive is just one. The comprehensive Action Plan takes a holistic approach in addressing the many interacting structural constraints affecting the housing market in areas such as planning and land use, as well as regulation and skills defi-

cits in the construction sector. While the primary focus of the Action Plan is to tackle structural constraints, fiscal supports can play a supporting and time-bound role in addressing the current problems in the housing sector.

It is in this context that the Help to Buy scheme should be considered. Its role is to complement the other measures in the Action Plan. The extent to which the scheme could lead to an increase in residential property prices will very much depend on the speed and efficiency with which structural supply constraints are eliminated and residential building activity increases. Therefore, the impact of the HTB incentive on property prices should not be considered in isolation from the impact of other measures contained in the Action Plan, which are primarily designed to increase supply. In this regard I note that a number of indicators point to a strengthening recovery in the housing market. The latest Ulster Bank construction PMI indicates a pickup in the rate of construction activity growth of approximately 1 per cent between March and April. The index suggests that housing activity has continued to expand each month since July 2013.

From a supply perspective, commencement notices in the 12 months to February 2017 (13,169), increased by approximately 27.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2016 while new house guarantee registrations (6,537) increased by approximately 53 per cent. ESB connections, a proxy for house completions rather than the level of construction activity (15,327), increased by 15.7 per cent in the 12 months to February 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. However, the growth in both starts and completions continues to emanate from a very low base and it will take some time for the level of new construction to meet the current demographic demand for housing.

In my view, it is the lack of supply that is primarily responsible for driving house prices higher and I would point out that increases in house prices prevailed long before the introduction of the Help to Buy incentive. I would also point out that the incentive is targeted towards new build homes only, and to first-time buyers only, and it would be simplistic to designate this incentive as being the sole or the major contributor to house price increases.

Furthermore, the incentive is designed to help first-time buyers obtain the deposit required to facilitate the purchase of a home. Therefore it helps first-time buyers to meet the loan to value requirements of the Central Bank's macro-prudential rules. However, the loan to income requirements of those rules must also be satisfied and the incentive plays no role in relation to that aspect.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department continues to monitor developments in the property market including movements in property prices. In this regard, the Deputy may be aware that following a competitive tender process I have commissioned Indecon Economic Consultants to undertake an independent impact assessment of the incentive. This will look at, among other issues, its potential impact on property prices, and the final report is due to be presented to me by 31 August 2017.

Central Bank of Ireland Enforcement Actions

26. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all fines paid, including the monetary value and transgression for each individual fine, by a bank (details supplied) since the State acquired a majority stake in the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23364/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, I as Minis-

ter 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 failings where there is sufficient evidence to support such action.

The fines imposed by the bank's regulator in the period since the State acquired a majority shareholding in AIB are as follows:

Date	Breach	Fine
2017	Criminal Justice (Money Laundering & Terrorist Financing) Act, 2010	€2,275,000
2013	Management of Liquidity Risk and the European Communities (Licensing and Supervision of Credit Institutions) Regulations 1992	€490,000

I will briefly comment on the most recent fine imposed.

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 the obligations set out in the Criminal Justice Act 2010 (CJA 2010) for countering the financing of terrorism ("CFT").

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.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

27. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the funds that have been drawn down from within the State from the Junckers investment fund since its inception. [23572/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), one pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe, at times referred to as the Juncker Plan.

As the Deputy may be aware, since EFSI's enactment in July 2015, it has been possible for any project promoter, either public or private, to engage with the EIB regarding the possibility of receiving loans or guarantees under EFSI for particular projects.

In this way, EFSI is providing an important additional funding possibility alongside other possibilities such as the EIB's normal lending, the State's borrowings through the NTMA and other mechanisms such as PPPs and off-balance sheet vehicles which are options for funding investment additional to the State's capital investment programme. It should be remembered that each EFSI loan entered into by the State pre-commits funding for the repayment of such loans, and has to be considered in the context of the expenditure benchmark under the EU's fiscal rules.

In general, Government Departments have existing relationships with the EIB so it has been a matter for each Department to advance any projects, in coordination with the Government's Capital Plan as coordinated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department has no role in assessing projects either public or private which may be the subject of applications for EFSI loans/guarantees.

Since inception, Ireland has seen the main potential beneficiaries of EFSI as being in the private sector including entities such as PPP companies. I am pleased that the Department of Health's Primary Health Care Centres PPP has successfully drawn down EFSI funds. In addition, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has successfully engaged with European Financial Instruments such as the COSME and the InnovFin Guarantee Programme, both of which are made available under the EFSI SME Window. These support the financing needs of SMEs and ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable and appropriate credit to meet their needs.

I can inform the Deputy that there is a publicly available list of projects which have been approved for EFSI support by the EIB in the State which is available on the EIB website. The list can be viewed according to each Member State and I would ask the Deputy to be aware that the Irish list contains both private and public sector projects, and it also includes cross-border projects between Irish entities and entities in other Member States.

Budget 2018

28. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will rule out further tax cuts in budget 2018 in view of recent disappointing Exchequer returns and to ensure all fiscal space is directed towards maintaining and improving public services and investment in capital infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23359/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Programme for Partnership Government recognises the need to invest in public services and capital infrastructure, to meet increasing demographic demands, provide targeted expenditure increase for improvements focusing upon health, housing, education, disability, child care and development, and that capital investment in key physical and social infrastructure can support growth and continued job creation.

Hence the Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment that budget measures will be introduced that will involve at least a 2:1 split between public spending and tax reductions. This commitment is also contained in the confidence and supply agreement with Fianna Fáil. However, the actual ratio of spending increases to tax reductions in Budget 2017 was over 3:1.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that gross voted expenditure in the year to date, while being managed within profile, has increased by 3% year-on-year and that gross voted capital expenditure has increased by 31% year-on-year to end April. This demonstrates the Governments on-going commitment to investing in public services and capital infrastructure.

The Programme for Partnership Government also contains a commitment to continue to phase out the 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. Reductions will be introduced on a fair basis with an emphasis on low and middle income earners and are designed to encourage and reward work. The commitment to introduce reductions in the USC on a fair basis with an emphasis on low and middle income earners is also referred to in the confidence and supply agreement.

The need to continually improve our competitiveness and support continuing job creation is of utmost importance in the context of minimising any potential impact on the economy that may arise from the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

Although tax revenue for the first four months of the year are slightly behind expectations, it will not impact on the fiscal space available for Budget 2018 as the fiscal rules provide for expenditure growth, net of discretionary revenue measures, to be based on the trend growth rate rather than revenue buoyancy, whether negative or positive.

Finally, I would remind the Deputy that decisions around Budget 2018 measures will not be made at this stage. The Summer Economic Statement, due to be published next month, represents the start of the 2018 budgetary process and it will set out the broad parameters and constraints over the medium term.

Brexit Issues

29. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance further to a survey by a company (details supplied) that showed a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of customs regulations and practices, the steps he will take to ensure businesses are fully prepared for this outcome should the Government fail to secure a special status designation for Northern Ireland. [23030/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is worth reiterating that the Government's absolute preference is to maintain the closest possible trading relationship between the UK and the EU/Ireland. The EU negotiating guidelines include strong acknowledgement of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border. 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 trading arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK.

Those sectors of Irish business which do not trade outside the EU at present have had no reason to build up an expertise in customs procedures. On the other hand, very many Irish businesses are familiar with the requirements for trading with countries around the world, and their concerns have more to do with the precise arrangements that will apply after Brexit.

I am informed by Revenue that they are engaged in ongoing contacts with business to develop knowledge of the general implications of a customs regime, and have full information on customs available on their website www.revenue.ie/en/customs/index.html. As more information becomes available, Revenue plan to conduct an outreach programme to ensure that all businesses are fully equipped to make the necessary decisions in relation to customs to prepare for the future.

Tracker Mortgages Examination

30. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the Central Bank's tracker mortgage review; the number of mortgages involved in the review; the number of persons who have received redress and compensation to date; if he is satisfied that the independent appeal systems put in place by the banks are sufficient for aggrieved customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23535/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank of Ireland published a report providing an update on the Tracker Examination on 23 March.

As the Central Bank has set out in the report:

- approximately 9,900 customer accounts had been identified as impacted by lenders, as part of the Examination, as at end February 2017;

- lenders had commenced contacting impacted customers identified as at end February 2017 and had rectified the interest rates applied to such impacted customers' accounts, thus stopping further detriment; as at the date of the Report, interest rates had been rectified on more than 90% of the accounts that require such rectification;

- to end February 2017, as set out in the report, approximately €78m had been paid in redress and compensation to approximately 2,600 impacted customers identified as part of the Examination.

The framework of the Examination provides that lenders should establish an independent appeals process to deal with customers who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the redress and compensation offers that they receive from lenders in respect of these matters. As the Central Bank Principles for Redress provide that all redress and compensation payments are made to customers on an upfront basis, customers can accept the redress and compensation offered and still make an appeal. In addition, the impacted customer has the option of bringing a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman or initiating court proceedings.

The Central Bank has advised that a further update will be provided on the Examination in autumn 2017.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 15.

Excise Duties

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on excise duties on diesel vehicles in the context of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21494/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Economic Growth

33. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he re-

mains satisfied regarding Ireland's growth potential for the future in comparison with all other EU states within the euro zone and without notwithstanding Brexit or shifting geopolitical positions; if particular positional changes are required to maximise Ireland's potential ; the way in which Ireland now compares economically with its EU neighbours in terms of economic performance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23570/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, Ireland was the fastest growing economy in the EU in 2016. Real GDP growth in Ireland was 5.2 per cent in 2016 compared with real GDP growth in the EU economy and euro area economy of 1.9 per cent and 1.8 per cent, respectively. Domestic demand made a strong positive contribution to growth in 2016 while on an underlying basis i.e. excluding contract manufacturing, both goods and service exports recorded very strong growth despite the weakness in sterling. While the 2016 outturn is based on preliminary quarterly data which is highly volatile and prone to revision, the numbers provide clear evidence of continued momentum in the economy and are consistent with strong employment growth.

According to the European Commission, Ireland is also expected to be among the fastest growing economies in Europe this year and next. The European Commission expects Ireland's economy to grow by 4.0 per cent this year and by 3.6 per cent next year. This compares with growth of 1.9 per cent this year and next for the EU and with growth of 1.7 per cent this year and 1.8 per cent next year for the euro area. From 2019 onwards, my Department expects GDP to grow by just under 3 per cent per annum on average which is broadly in line with the potential growth rate of the economy with positive contributions from both exports and domestic demand.

The Government's priority is to ensure continued, sustainable economic growth in order to further increase living standards and reduce unemployment. With regard to Brexit and other external risks to the outlook, the best way to deal with such risks is through competitiveness oriented policies and prudent management of the public finances. That is what this Government will continue to do.

Visa Applications

34. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will grant a holiday visa to a person (details supplied). [23625/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a visa application was made in October 2016 which was refused. While it was open to appeal that decision within two months, no such appeal was made.

It remains open to the persons named to make a fresh visa application. The INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie) contains comprehensive guidelines to assist the applicant with the application process. The information contained on the website is for guidance purposes only and does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications.

Where an application is made by or on behalf of a child, it is important to ensure that the persons travelling with the child are authorised to have the child in their care. If the child is travelling with one or both of his or her parents, it is necessary to ensure that evidence of the relationship is provided. This is normally achieved through the provision of birth certificates and passports. Where the child is travelling with one parent only, it is necessary to provide evidence that the other parent agrees to the child's travel or that the parent caring for the child

has sole custody of the child. In the case of an adopted child, evidence of the legal adoption will be necessary.

Each visa application is assessed on its own merits. Therefore, all information that the applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included where a visa application is submitted. It is strongly advised that the application fully addresses the reasons for the earlier refusal in any new application.

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

Departmental Staff Recruitment

35. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when a county registrar will be appointed in County Westmeath; and if the person appointed will deal only with County Westmeath. [23643/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, I approved a proposal to fill the County Registrar vacancy in County Westmeath and a recruitment competition is currently being conducted by the Public Appointments Service. The competition, which I understand will be completed shortly, will identify persons for recommendation to Government for appointment to the position of County Registrar for Meath/Westmeath.

Garda Deployment

36. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in County Kildare by station on 30 April 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23663/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that, as of the 31 March 2017, there were 323 Garda together with 22 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians attached to the Kildare Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), the Garda National Economic Crime

Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am advised by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, 981 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 50 of whom were assigned to the Kildare Division. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across the organisation, including the Kildare Division.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table the number of Garda assigned to the the Kildare Division on 30 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, as provided by the Commissioner.

Strength of the Kildare Division 30 April 2016 and 31 March 2017

District	Station	April 2016	March 2017
KILDARE	ATHY	27	27
	CASTLEDERMOT	3	4
	KILDARE	34	36
	MONASTEREVIN	4	5
	NEWBRIDGE	49	42
	RATHANGAN	2	3
	Total	119	117
	LEIXLIP	CARBURY	8
CELBRIDGE		11	11
KILCOCK		9	9
LEIXLIP		37	50
MAYNOOTH		13	14
Total		78	91
NAAS	CLANE	7	7
	KILCULLEN	2	2
	NAAS	102	104
	ROBERTSTOWN	3	2
	Total	114	115

District	Station	April 2016	March 2017
Kildare Division	15 Stations	311	323
Total			

Data Protection

37. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the attention of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner has been drawn to the increasing use of digital billboard and signage screens known as digital out of home advertising (details supplied) in public places which incorporate a digital camera and software to identify and track the behaviours of those who pass these billboards; if there are requirements for premises to inform persons of the presence of such billboards; the collected data which may be retained by these companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23684/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Dara Murphy): The position is the Data Protection Commissioner acts independently in the performance of her tasks and exercise of her powers under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. I understand that the matter referred to by the Deputy has come to the attention of the Commissioner and that she has issued a statement in relation to the use of facial detection technology for advertising purposes. The statement is available on the website of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner: www.dataprotection.ie.

Coroners Service

38. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will introduce legislation to provide for mandatory inquiries by the coroner in the event of a death of a mother during childbirth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23687/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm to the Deputy that I intend to introduce legislation regarding maternal deaths and related matters to ensure that such deaths are subject to a coroner's inquest. That work, to which I have assigned priority, will be undertaken in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and I would acknowledge in particular the Coroners Amendment Bill 2015, a Private Member's Bill tabled by Deputy Clare Daly, in relation to this issue.

Garda College

39. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has briefed or had any contact with or from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement regarding the ongoing issues relating to the historical and-or current financial arrangements at Templemore Garda College; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23720/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As you will be aware I have indicated my concern at the findings of the Interim Internal Audit Report in relation to the financial procedures in the Garda College Templemore. As you will also be aware, the Public Accounts Committee is examining the Garda Commissioner in relation to the Interim Audit Report and intends to resume that examination in the coming weeks, and will report subsequently. Very particular responsibilities lie with Accounting Officers and you will appreciate that I must be careful not to interfere in any way with the work of that Committee.

I can assure you that I will pay very careful attention to the proceedings at the Committee and, in particular, any report they may make. If action is required on my part as a result, I will not hesitate to take it. Contact of the nature outlined in the question has not arisen.

While, of course, there has to be accountability in relation to what went on at the College, the immediate priority has to be ensuring the problems identified in the audit are resolved. I have been assured that the Garda Authorities recognise the gravity of the issues raised and that they are taking comprehensive steps to progress the recommendations in the Report. External governance expertise and auditors have been engaged. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Garda Síochána Chief Administrative Officer and including a representative from my Department, is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. In addition, upon receipt of the report I referred it to the Policing Authority to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to report back to me each quarter. I expect the Authority to submit its first report to me in July. Furthermore I am advised that the Commissioner has requested an Assistant Commissioner to examine the Report with a view to establishing if there are any matters of discipline or criminality that need to be addressed and, if so, how such matters should be progressed.

Cyber Security Policy

40. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of personnel currently engaged in cyber crime policing in An Garda Síochána, both attested gardaí and civilians. [23744/17]

45. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which the Garda cyber crime bureau was established; the number of personnel in same to date in 2017; and the rank of each garda member involved. [23775/17]

46. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of regional cyber crime units that have been established; the regions that have one; the number of personnel in each regional cyber crime unit to date in 2017; and the rank of each garda member involved. [23776/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 40, 45 and 46 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources within the organisation, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that the allocation of resources is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Deployment

41. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Cork division in each year since Garda recruitment resumed in 2014; and the attested personnel strength of each in September 2014 and at the end of April 2017. [23757/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that the allocation of Gardaí is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his or her Division.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing well. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, 981 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Cork Divisions in the coming years.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of new Gardaí assigned to each Cork Division each year following the resumption of Garda recruitment in 2014 and the strength of each of the Divisions concerned in September 2014 and each year up to 31 March 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set out in the following tables.

Number of new Gardaí assigned to each Cork Division

Division	2015	2016	2017	Total
Cork City	5	5	10	20
Cork North	0	5	5	10

Division	2015	2016	2017	Total
Cork West	5	0	5	10

Strength of each Cork Division Sept 2014 - March 2017

Division	Sept 2014	Sept 2015	Sept 2016	March 2017
Cork City	673	658	648	646
Cork North	301	298	297	304
Cork West	275	275	277	281

*As of 31 March 2017

Garda College

42. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when her attention was drawn to an interim internal audit into financial irregularities at the Garda training college; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23760/17]

43. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that the Garda Commissioner notified her promptly and appropriately in respect of the Commissioner first coming aware of financial irregularities at the Garda training college; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23761/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 43 together.

My Department received a copy of the draft Interim Internal Audit Report regarding the finances at the Garda College at Templemore from An Garda Síochána's Head of the Internal Audit on 16 September 2016. I understand that the draft report was sent to all interested parties for their observations before being finalised. A copy of the final Report was received by my Department from the Garda Commissioner on 27 March 2017. As I have previously indicated, the circumstances giving rise to notifications in relation to certain matters to me or my Department are primarily a matter for the judgement of the Garda Authorities, in the light of relevant legal provisions and the nature and extent of information available at a particular time.

As the Deputy will be aware I have indicated publicly my concern at the findings of the Interim Internal Audit Report. As the Deputy will also be aware the Public Accounts Committee is examining the Commissioner in relation to the Interim Audit Report and intends to resume that examination in the coming weeks, and will report subsequently. Very particular responsibilities lie with Accounting Officers and you will appreciate that I must be careful not to interfere in any way with the work of that Committee. I can assure the Deputy that I will pay very careful attention to the proceedings at the Committee and, in particular, any report they may make. If action is required on my part as a result, I will not hesitate to take it.

While, of course, there has to be accountability in relation to what went on at the College, the immediate priority has to be ensuring the problems identified in the audit are resolved. I have been assured that the Garda Authorities recognise the gravity of the issues raised and that they are taking comprehensive steps to progress the recommendations in the Report. External governance expertise and auditors have been engaged. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Garda Síochána Chief Administrative Officer and including a representative from my Department, is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. In addition, upon receipt of the report I referred it to the Policing Authority to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to report back to me each quarter. I expect the Authority to submit its first

report to me in July.

Garda College

44. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the action she has taken since her attention was drawn to a bank account opened in the Garda training college without her permission as cited in an interim audit report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23762/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware I have indicated publicly my concern at the findings of the Interim Internal Audit Report in relation to the finances of the Garda College Templemore. As the Deputy will also be aware, the Public Accounts Committee is examining the Garda Commissioner in relation to the Interim Audit Report and intends to resume that examination in the coming weeks, and will report subsequently. Very particular responsibilities lie with Accounting Officers and you will appreciate that I must be careful not to interfere in any way with the work of the Committee. I can assure the Deputy that I will pay very careful attention to the proceedings at the Committee and, in particular, any report that it makes. If action is required on my part as a result, I will not hesitate to take it.

While, of course, there has to be accountability in relation to what went on at the College, the immediate priority has to be ensuring the problems identified in the audit are resolved. I have been assured that the Garda Authorities recognise the gravity of the issues raised and that they are taking comprehensive steps to progress the recommendations in the Report. External governance expertise and auditors have been engaged. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Garda Síochána Chief Administrative Officer and including a representative from my Department, is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. In addition, upon receipt of the report I referred it to the Policing Authority to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to report back to me each quarter. I expect the Authority to submit its first report to me in July.

Insofar as the account to which the Deputy refers is concerned, I understand that an instruction has been issued by the Garda Authorities to the relevant bank that the account should be closed.

Questions Nos. 45 and 46 answered with Question No. 40.

Domestic Violence Incidence

47. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to media reports that the Central Statistics Office cannot stand over Garda domestic violence figures following a detailed analysis; the steps her Department and An Garda Síochána are taking to address the under-recording of domestic violence incidents in the PULSE system; the cause of this under-recording; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23790/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistics agency, is responsible for the publication of the official Recorded Crime Statistics. These figures are published on a quarterly basis, but domestic violence incidents are not currently recorded as a separate category within the classification system used for this purpose.

As the Deputy is aware, there are already a number of measures being taken to advance data collection, collation and analysis in relation to crime incidents generally and specifically in the area of domestic violence.

Following on recommendations from the Garda Inspectorate, we have seen significant work to underpin the integrity of crime statistics, including two detailed reviews of crime data quality which were carried out in by the CSO in 2015 and 2016, and I understand that the CSO intends to carry out further such reviews. I am also advised that the Expert Group on Crime Statistics, chaired by the CSO, has prepared a report which considers a number of issues raised by the Garda Inspectorate and this is due to be published shortly.

In relation to domestic violence, Cosc – the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence; An Garda Síochána; the Courts Service; and the Probation Service are all currently working on a State Data Committee with the Central Statistics Office and Tusla under the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence 2016 – 2021 in order to improve data availability and disaggregation in the area. Specifically, the Second National Strategy provides for the establishment of a gold standard with regard to the collection and analysis of data under a range of categories. Similarly, the recently established Data Working Group, chaired by Cosc, with representative members from non-government organisations including Women’s Aid, SAFE Ireland and Sonas Domestic Violence Charity Ltd. are currently devising a work plan to advise on the enhancement of data in the area.

I am advised that the recording of incidents relating to domestic abuse is closely monitored by the Garda National Protective Services Bureau to ensure:

- a uniform approach is maintained in the recording and investigation of such incidents;
- that records accurately reflect such violence/abuse; and
- that victims receive appropriate supports from members of An Garda Síochána, in the monitoring, managing and investigation of such incidents and from other state and non-governmental organisations within the community.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that work is ongoing, including appropriate consultations with the CSO, to ensure that proper quality assurance processes are put in place, with a view to allowing for the publication of relevant statistical information in due course.

Work to address the full range of the Garda Inspectorate’s recommendations, including in relation to data quality, is ongoing and is supported by very large investments totalling €330 million from 2016-2021 for Garda technology and systems, including €250 million under the Capital Plan.

I can assure the Deputy that significant work is underway to improve the collection of data relating to the recording of domestic violence. While progress has been made, further incremental improvements will occur over time, resulting in the delivery of far more robust data to support An Garda Síochána in analysing and improving their service to victims of domestic violence.

Garda Reports

48. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 80 of 4 May 2017, if she has received the promised report from the Garda authorities on this matter; if so, the conclusions of this report; the steps her Depart-

ment and An Garda Síochána will take on foot of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23791/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As set out in my reply to the Deputy on 04 May 2017, my Department is in contact with the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and a full report is awaited. I will communicate further with the Deputy when this report is to hand.

Garda College

49. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on media reports that documents discovered in Garda headquarters show her Department was informed regarding financial irregularities at Templemore in June 2008; the steps she is taking on foot of these reports; when she was informed of these irregularities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23792/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department received a copy of the draft Interim Internal Audit Report regarding the finances at the Garda College at Templemore from An Garda Síochána's Head of the Internal Audit on 16 September 2016. I understand that the draft report was sent to all interested parties for their observations before being finalised. A copy of the final Report was received by my Department from the Garda Commissioner on 27 March 2017.

As the Deputy will be aware I have indicated publicly my concern at the findings of the Interim Internal Audit Report. As the Deputy will also be aware the Public Accounts Committee is examining the Commissioner in relation to the Interim Audit Report and intends to resume that examination in the coming weeks, and will report subsequently. The Garda Commissioner has been Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote since July 2006. Very particular responsibilities lie with Accounting Officers under the law. However, I understand that this matter has already been addressed before the Committee. I can assure the Deputy that I will pay very careful attention to the proceedings at the Committee and, in particular, any report that it may make. If action is required on my part as a result, I will not hesitate to take it.

While, of course, there has to be accountability in relation to what went on at the College, the immediate priority has to be ensuring the problems identified in the audit are resolved. I have been assured that the Garda Authorities recognise the gravity of the issues raised and that they are taking comprehensive steps to progress the recommendations in the Report. External governance expertise and auditors have been engaged. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Garda Síochána Chief Administrative Officer and including a representative from my Department, is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. In addition, upon receipt of the report I referred it to the Policing Authority to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to report back to me each quarter. I expect the Authority to submit its first report to me in July.

Surveillance Operations

50. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of ministerial warrants issued under the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993 in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23818/17]

51. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the operation of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993 and the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009 in regard to covert surveillance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23819/17]

52. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda applications for surveillance powers that were applied for, accepted, amended and rejected by the relevant authorised officer, designated judges or Minister under the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993 and the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009 in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23820/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 51 and 52 together.

It is not the practice and it would be contrary to the public interest to disclose details of any authorisations to intercept, including their number. The Deputy will appreciate that this the long-standing practice, which has been followed by my predecessors, and it has been adopted for sound security reasons.

Furthermore, Section 12 of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993 places a requirement on the Minister for Justice and Equality to ensure that such arrangements are in place to limit to the minimum necessary the disclosure of the fact that an authorisation has been given, and the contents of any communication which has been intercepted pursuant to an authorisation. The Act defines “necessary” as necessary for the purpose of the prevention or detection of serious offences or in the interests of the security of the State.

As the House will be aware, I am currently working on proposals to extend the interception regime to more modern forms of communication, particularly in the light of threats posed by organised crime gangs and terrorist groups. When the House has a chance to consider any new legislative proposals, all issues which arise in this very important area can be looked at afresh.

Immigration Status

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23852/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made in August 2009, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

An application to have the Deportation Order revoked pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, was considered and the Deportation Order was affirmed in October 2009. The person concerned returned to his country of origin in 2010 but came back to the State in 2015.

The person concerned has sought to be re-admitted to the asylum/protection process and the initial decision in this regard is currently under review. Once a final decision has been ar-

rived at, it will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision in this instance will be to re-admit, or refuse to re-admit, the person concerned to the asylum/protection process.

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

Deportation Orders

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans regarding a proposed deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23853/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 28 April 2017. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Deportation Orders

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans regarding the proposed deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23854/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 28 April 2017. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Immigration Status

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23855/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 9 May 2017, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Immigration Status

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23857/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this person's request for immigration permission is currently under consideration and INIS will be writing to the person concerned shortly.

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

Residency Permits

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the approval of stamp 4 status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23862/17]

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

formed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first and second named persons were granted permission to remain in the State in August 2007, for an initial three year period, valid to 14th August 2010. This permission to remain was renewed for a further three year period valid to 14th August 2013. These renewal decision letters were dated 4th August 2010.

The renewal decision letters referred to advised the persons concerned of the requirement that they apply for further renewal of their permission to remain one month before their existing permission expired. Given that there is no record of any such renewal applications having been lodged to date, it is recommended that the persons concerned would proceed to do so without further delay.

The onus is on the persons concerned to apply for the renewal of their respective permission to remain. Such renewal applications must be made in the first instance in order for them to be considered by the immigration authorities.

The INIS has no record of the third named dependant of the person concerned.

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

Deportation Orders

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23863/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 3rd February 2010.

Representations were received from the persons' legal representative, pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. All relevant aspects of the case will be carefully considered before a decision is made. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Residency Permits

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

will make a statement on the matter. [23864/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a letter granting an immigration permission (Stamp 3) issued to the person mentioned by the Deputy on 20 March 2017.

If this person meets the criteria for permission under the De Facto partnership scheme, as published on our website, www.inis.gov.ie, it is open to this person to make such an application. The application form and relevant information is available on our website.

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

Garda Equipment

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for selecting a device (details supplied) as the roadside kit for drug testing drivers; if An Garda Síochána has been advised that it cannot be used in temperatures under five degrees celsius; the measures which will be taken to ensure accurate testing can occur at night during colder months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23882/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has advised that the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS) has statutory responsibility for the approval, supply and testing of the Draeger Drug-Test 5000 and is providing training to An Garda Síochána in the use of these devices. As such, I have referred your question to the MBRS for direct reply.

Prison Building Programme

62. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 75 and 76 of 30 March 2017, if she will provide a breakdown of the additional €20.7 million spend on a site (details supplied) since the initial purchase in 2005; the annual cost of maintaining and running the site; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23883/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The €20.7 million spend refers to costs incurred up to May, 2015 on the Thornton Hall site over and above the land purchase costs of €29,900,000 in 2005 mentioned in my response to Dáil question numbers 75 and 76 of 30 March 2017. A detailed breakdown of this sum of €20.7 million is contained in Chapter 9 of the Comptroller & Auditor General's Report on the Accounts of the Public Services in 2014 (No. 9 Development of Prison Accommodation in Dublin). This C&AG Report, which explains in further detail the background to the Thornton project, is available on its website - www.audgen.gov.ie. The Public Accounts Committee subsequently examined this issue in November 2015.

In relation to ongoing maintenance and other costs, the information is currently being col-

lated and I will respond to the Deputy directly as soon as the information is to hand.

Sale of State Assets

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the partial sale of a bank (details supplied) to be realised; if he will use the funds generated from the sale towards essential capital investment in the event of a shortage of capital investment here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23595/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Program for a Partnership Government allows for the sale of not more than 25% of any bank before the end of 2018 (plus any over-allotment option). I have not yet made any decision to proceed with a sale of shares in AIB. In order to proceed with an IPO I would need to be satisfied that the market is prepared to put a fair and reasonable value on the banks equity, bearing in mind the bank's current performance, its future prospects and the outlook for the Irish economy. I would do so on the advice of my officials in my department and our financial advisors.

As I have outlined previously, the sale of financial assets, such as bank shares are transactions which do not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance (GGB) under EUROSTAT rules. This is due to the fact that this type of disposal is classified as a financial transaction whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (such as shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently, the sale of any shareholding in AIB would not count as general government revenue. Therefore, there would not be increased capacity to spend on capital projects as a result of the sale of shares in AIB without affecting the general government balance.

While not improving the deficit, cash proceeds arising from any sale of shares would result in a reduced requirement for Exchequer borrowing which ultimately results in lower debt. A lower debt level is not only beneficial in terms of the fiscal sustainability of the State but would also lead to reduced interest payments in future years.

As public indebtedness rose partly due to the recapitalisation of the Banks, the appropriate way of treating one-off revenue from divesting the State of its banking assets is to use these proceeds towards debt reduction. These disposals would also help contain contingent liabilities for the State.

As a further comment, though unrelated to banking policy, I have previously acknowledged the need for increased public investment. The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which this Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, and in areas such as housing and health, as the Deputy has identified, into the future. As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of almost €400 million in comparison to the 2016 outturn. By 2021 it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach €7.3 billion, an increase of over 100 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014. Based on my Department's GNP forecasts, Ireland's Exchequer public investment will reach 2.7% of GNP by 2021. These increases in investment over the coming years will be allocated to identified priorities on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan currently underway.

Tracker Mortgages Examination

64. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank's order to

lending banks to return affected customers to an appropriate tracker rate of interest has been undertaken; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that banks are free to come up with their own offers of compensation and that many banks are not offering customers effective redress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23596/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank of Ireland published a report providing an update on the Tracker Examination on 23 March.

As the Central Bank has set out in the report:

- approximately 9,900 customer accounts had been identified as impacted by lenders, as part of the Examination, as at end February 2017;

- lenders had commenced contacting impacted customers identified as at end February 2017 and had rectified the interest rates applied to such impacted customers' accounts, thus stopping further detriment; as at the date of the Report, interest rates had been rectified on more than 90% of the accounts that require such rectification;

- to end February 2017, approximately €78m had been paid in redress and compensation to approximately 2,600 impacted customers identified as part of the Examination.

The Central Bank invoked its powers under Section 22 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 to set specific timelines for lenders to complete Phase 2 of the Examination, the last of which will be completed no later than end September 2017.

Regarding compensation, the Central Bank does not have the statutory power to set compensation levels or to compel lenders to implement redress and compensation programmes in respect of failures that occurred prior to the introduction of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (the "2013 Act"). However, as part of the Examination framework, where customer detriment is identified, the Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to impacted customers in line with prescribed Principles for Redress. The Principles for Redress are designed to ensure that impacted customers receive appropriate redress and compensation in a timely manner.

Key elements of the Central Bank's expectations in respect of redress and compensation for impacted customers include:

- any harm is stopped at the earliest possible time after each group of impacted customers is identified;

- the interest rates applied to impacted customers' accounts revert to the appropriate tracker interest rate or impacted customers are given the opportunity to revert to such a rate where relevant;

- redress will be provided to impacted customers to return them to the position they would have been in had lenders' failures not occurred;

- reasonable compensation, that reflects the detriment suffered by individual customers, is provided;

- redress and compensation is to be paid to impacted customers up front at the point of offer and compensation cannot be reduced by virtue of a customer lodging an appeal; and

- an additional payment is to be provided to impacted customers at the point of offer to enable them to take independent professional advice regarding the redress and compensation

offers made to them;

As the Examination continues to progress, the Central Bank will continue to challenge the position a lender has taken in relation to particular groups of customers to ensure the fair treatment of tracker mortgage customers.

The framework of the Examination also provides that lenders should establish an independent appeals process to deal with customers who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the redress and compensation offers that they receive from lenders in respect of these matters. As the Central Bank Principles for Redress provide that all redress and compensation payments are made to customers on an upfront basis, customers can accept the redress and compensation offered and still make an appeal. In addition, the impacted customer has the option of bringing a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman or initiating court proceedings.

Brexit Issues

65. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide financial support to companies and SMEs that may be adversely effected by Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23597/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Brexit and its aftermath will lead to challenges for SMEs. The exact nature of the impact of Brexit on SMEs is not clear or definitive at present, given the uncertainty surrounding the post Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU. However, SMEs will require support to diversify their exports to reduce their exposure to the UK, re-price their products and services as well as restructuring their cost bases so they can continue trading with the UK even with sterling at a weaker level. The Deputy may rest assured that it is a key Government strategy to ensure State supports enable the growth of Irish SMEs by facilitating access to credit and promoting investment in SMEs. Advisory supports in relation to business planning, such as those provided by the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, will be particularly vital for assisting SMEs that may be adversely affected by Brexit and will help raise awareness of both private market financial supports and existing State supports that are available.

As the Deputy will be aware there are already significant Government measures to support the financing needs of SMEs and these will be available to assist SMEs deal with the effects of Brexit. SMEs can access lower cost, flexible finance from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). To the end of December 2016, the SBCI has lent €544 million to 12,593 SMEs. The SBCI's goal is to increase the availability of funding to SMEs at a lower cost and on more flexible terms than has been available in recent times on the Irish market. The SBCI uses an on-lending model; this means it does not lend directly to SMEs. At present, the SBCI has 3 bank and 5 non-bank on-lenders. The SMEs who received SBCI finance are from a variety of business and economic sectors. More than 80% of loans are for investment purposes and the average loan size is €43,200. There is a broad regional spread of the SMEs supported, with 84.8% of them based outside Dublin. As well as the SBCI, there is the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices and the Credit Review Office.

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

The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering

a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. Further information is available on the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation website.

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

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

My Department is currently working with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to examine additional policy measures that may be required to assist SMEs deal with the impact of Brexit.

Banking Sector Regulation

66. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that mortgage holders, tenants and SMEs that have loans or credit from non-bank lenders or vulture funds are fully protected; if he will consider extending the provisions of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23598/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is no agreement on the precise meaning of the term “vulture funds” and it has come to have pejorative connotations. I presume that the Deputy intends referring to private equity funds. The Deputy will be aware that international private equity funds invested much needed capital in our economy during a period of high risk and uncertainty.

The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 was enacted in July 2015. It was introduced by the previous Government to fill the consumer protection gap where loans were sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. The Act introduced a regulatory regime for a new type of entity called a ‘credit servicing firm’. Credit Servicing Firms are now subject to the provisions of Irish financial services law that apply to ‘regulated financial service providers’.

Under the Act, purchasers of loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm that is regulated by the Central Bank. The significant point is that the regulation is focussed at the point of contact with the customer. Therefore relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation in July 2016. It is also important to highlight that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower’s rights and obligations under the original contract.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank is now the competent authority for the authorisation and supervision of credit servicing firms. Credit servicing firms must comply with all relevant requirements of financial services legislation, including the various codes and Regulations mentioned already and Fitness and Probity Standards (including minimum competency requirements).

In addition to compliance with Central Bank codes of conduct, credit servicing firms will have to demonstrate to the Central Bank that they have:

- Robust governance and adequate resources to ensure compliance;
- Agreements with loan owners that enable the credit servicing firm to fully comply with its obligations under Irish financial services legislation; and
- Adequate and effective control of loan servicing in the State to enable Central Bank oversight.

In addition, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 ensures that a regulated credit servicing firm cannot do something, or fail to do something, which would be a prescribed contravention if performed, or not performed, by a retail credit firm. The legislation also prevents the owner of credit from instructing a regulated credit servicing firm to perform such an action. Therefore the borrower is protected because the owner cannot give an instruction that would breach the rules but also the instruction cannot be implemented by the regulated credit servicer, over whom the Central Bank has oversight as a regulated entity.

Nonetheless, my Department will continue to keep all relevant legislation under review in order to ensure that borrowers whose loans have been sold are properly protected and do not lose any protections that they previously enjoyed. In addition, the Department of Finance expects that the Central Bank, as regulator of credit servicing firms, will be vigilant in this area and raise any specific instances where they have found consumers have not had their protections upheld or that their positions have been disadvantaged.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

67. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funding which has been made available through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund for social and affordable housing provision; if he is satisfied with the current rates of interest being charged to borrowers through the fund; if he will review the operation of the mechanisms through which credit is accessed from the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23599/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In line with Rebuilding Ireland commitments, the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and a number of key Government Departments are examining the feasibility of establishing a funding vehicle, in conjunction with the private sector, which could facilitate investment in social and affordable housing.

Key factors which must be addressed to facilitate ISIF involvement in such projects include: the commercial viability of proposals; Eurostat treatment of fund structures which receive a substantial proportion of their revenue from Government sources; and the ability to create off-balance sheet vehicles outside of the existing PPP model. Engagement with the other stakeholders in both the public and private sector, including with Eurostat, is ongoing.

ISIF informs me that whilst it has made progress in conjunction with the other stakeholders in the public and private sectors in respect of this opportunity, as well as other potential social

housing investment opportunities, there are still considerable hurdles including commerciality and balance sheet treatment as identified in Rebuilding Ireland. These hurdles must be overcome before any such proposals can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Separately, ISIF is making a very substantial contribution to new private housing supply which is critical in terms of meeting the pent up demand for housing across all sectors of the market. In line with its double bottom line mandate, ISIF has already invested in a number of significant financing platforms and projects in the construction sector, and is actively examining other investment opportunities.

ISIF has total investment commitments to housing investment vehicles of €404m comprising €325m in Activate Capital, €25m in the Ardstone Residential Partnership and €54m to student accommodation in DCU. In addition ISIF has committed €125m in total to more general real estate investment vehicles, including €75m to the Wilbur Ross Cardinal Commercial Real Estate Mezzanine Debt Fund and €50m to Quadrant Real Estate Advisors, both of which to date have completed some investment in housing. Through these ISIF-supported projects, a total of 8,400 housing units is expected to be delivered in the near term (a small portion of which has already been delivered).

In addition, ISIF's current near term pipeline of potential housing projects, including in the build-to-rent sector and off-campus student accommodation as well as a smaller project that may have the ability to deliver some affordable housing, indicates potential to deliver a further 8,700 units in total.

ISIF is working with local authorities and private developers on the financing of housing-enabling infrastructure. Its pipeline includes one private sector pilot housing infrastructure project (totalling approximately 3,000 units) which is actively being progressed. Public sector projects (also totalling approximately 3,000 units) are currently being considered – the extent to which these projects can be progressed will in part depend on whether Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) or other forms of financing can be leveraged to complement ISIF financing.

ISIF is also currently engaging with a range of Higher Education Institutions (“HEIs”) in respect of the provision by them of on-campus student accommodation.

ISIF invests on a risk adjusted basis in the various housing financing platforms and these platforms, in turn, provide finance, also on a risk adjusted basis, to developers, which can be equity or debt according to the business model of each platform. The interest rate applied to any individual debt financing arrangement is related to the level of risk and other investment factors in the specific underlying housing development proposal.

Brexit Issues

68. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the preparations and contingency plans his Department has put in place in the event of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23600/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Department of Finance has been assessing and preparing for the impact of a British exit from the European Union since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016. Work was carried out in the Department to assess the potential economic and financial sector implications arising, including through the ESRI-Department of Finance research programme study published in November 2015 titled ‘Scoping the Possible Economic Implications of Brexit on Ireland’. This work was undertaken within the

whole-of-Government framework established by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Following the result of the UK referendum and to prepare for the forthcoming negotiations, work has been intensified across the whole of Government level including in my own Department. A Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate this work and to act as a key liaison point with the Department of the Taoiseach, in particular. In addition, the Department of Finance staff complement in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels has been strengthened. The challenges which we face as a result of Brexit is mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning.

As part of Budget 2017, the Department of Finance published the Economic and Fiscal outlook which presented a full macroeconomic projection including updated estimates of economic growth, the public finances and the fiscal space, taking account inter alia of the impact of Brexit. In addition, the Department published detailed analysis of sectoral exposure to Brexit across the economy. Utilising the Department of Finance sectoral exposure analysis, Budget 2017 included a number of measures to respond to the challenges of Brexit, to mitigate future risks, and to support any opportunities that might arise. These include measures to support SMEs, entrepreneurship, agri-food and Irish exporters.

More recently, the Department has worked with the ESRI to deepen the macroeconomic analysis and a report titled 'Modelling the Medium to Long Term Potential Macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland' was published in November 2016. In April 2017, updated macroeconomic forecasts were published by my Department, as part of the Stability Programme Update.

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

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

In this context, in Budget 2017, I signalled a lower debt target of 45 per cent of GDP for the mid-to-late 2020s. This will help to provide an additional fiscal 'shock absorber' capacity to the public finances to help withstand any shock including that of the impact of Brexit. It will also complement the contingency or 'rainy day' fund which will be established following the achievement of a balanced budget in 2018 and will help provide a further counter-cyclical buffer.

Continued prudent management of the public finances is a critical aspect of the Government's overall strategy to mitigate the economic challenges associated with Brexit, as outlined in the Government's Position paper published on 2 May. In that regard, as the Deputy will be aware now that the EU's initial negotiating position is clear, the Government will 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.

Separately, Brexit will provide opportunities for Ireland to increase its share of financial services based inward investment. Minister of State Eoghan Murphy T.D. has responsibility for Financial Services, including the implementation of the IFS2020 Strategy. The IFS2020

Strategy is a dynamic and evolving strategy. Brexit both underpins the IFS2020 Action Plan for 2017 and also features in the individual measures to achieve the strategic priorities of IFS2020. We will continue to leverage our IFS2020 Strategy to maximise any opportunities.

The work being done by the Department will be an important input to ensuring that Ireland will be in a position to counter any negative economic impact arising from Brexit and to ensure that Ireland's interests are protected in the upcoming negotiations at EU level.

The Department will continue to monitor the economic impacts, to carry out relevant analysis and to frame budgetary policy advice in this new context.

Banking Sector

69. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions his Department has had with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs regarding the investigation of the establishment of a local public bank network as committed to in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23601/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is the lead Department in respect of the Programme for Government commitment to thoroughly investigate the Sparkassen model of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, with the assistance of officials from my Department, undertook a consultation process, engaging with stakeholders. This consultation was completed at the end of March and it involved meetings with interested parties including Sparkassen, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland, who put forward proposals for local public banking in Ireland.

Officials from both Departments are now working to prepare a report for the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and myself. The report will outline the findings and conclusions of the investigation into the Sparkassen model of local public banking. It is anticipated that it will be completed by the end of the first half of this year. This work will form the basis for an informed policy consideration of local public banking.

European Investment Bank Loans

70. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions his Department has had with the European Investment Bank, EIB, and other Government Departments to establish an off balance sheet special purpose vehicle to draw down funding from the EIB to facilitate large scale mixed social and private residential development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23602/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): ISIF and the wider NTMA is examining the feasibility of establishing, in conjunction with the private sector, a Housing Investment Fund, in a way that is both off-balance sheet and is commercially viable. This vehicle should be capable of funding the delivery of substantial new mixed-tenure residential developments, comprising social and private housing.

Whilst a major objective of any such funding vehicle is to leverage additionality in terms of social housing supply, it is envisaged that a substantial portion of the overall supply of new units may need to be for private housing to meet the commerciality test and to satisfy the re-

quirements of an off-balance sheet investment model.

Although there have been a number of recent proposals in this space from private sector residential investors and developers, none have proven to be either commercial or likely to pass the requirements for an off-balance sheet model.

Engagement with a wide array of key stakeholders in both the public and private sector is ongoing and involves the input of relevant Government departments, the CSO and others. There is ongoing engagement, also, with the European authorities, including Eurostat, and the European Commission.

Initial discussions with the EIB have taken place, and these have explored possible EIB participation in funding the housing model. These discussions follow recent interaction between this Department and ISIF with the EIB regarding EIB support for housing projects in other Member States. Initial discussions and soundings indicate that the EIB is interested in supporting a housing model. Attention is now focused on developing a model which meets the off-balance sheet requirements, and one in which the EIB might participate.

On the occasion of the formal launch of the EIB Group office in Ireland on 9 December 2016, I chaired the first meeting of the EIB-Ireland Financing Group, comprising relevant Government Ministers, heads of agencies and EIB senior management. One of the purposes of the Group is to examine opportunities for using EIB financing and technical assistance to address housing, transport and other infrastructure investment requirements. The Group is supported by three sub-groups of officials and agency representatives, one of which is tasked with addressing issues in the area of Social Infrastructure, including housing.

Credit Unions

71. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the EURO-STAT investigation into the establishment by the Government of a bond to finance social housing investment suitable for credit unions to invest their surplus funds in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23603/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As previously referred to in Parliamentary Question numbers 191 of 4 April 2017 and 208 of 28 February 2017, the Government has been exploring potential mechanisms that would facilitate investment in social housing, including the off-balance sheet potential of private institutional investment. Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) led engagement on the Housing Fund mentioned in Rebuilding Ireland is currently ongoing, with a number of actors including both the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Eurostat.

The agreed Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance. Officials from both my Department and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government have met with credit union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how credit unions can assist in the area of social housing. Officials from both Departments have also met with the Central Bank. Separately, communication is ongoing between the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and my Department.

On 1 January 2016, I commenced the final sections of the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 (2012 Act) following discussions with credit union representative bodies. Following this commencement the Central Bank introduced the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016, regarding a number of areas including

savings, borrowing, lending, investments and liquidity.

The Central Bank has informed me that it has received information regarding proposals for credit unions to provide funding for social housing and is currently engaging with the sector on those proposals. It further stated that while it does not comment on specific proposals, such investments could be facilitated by future regulations made by the Central Bank, where appropriate. Ultimately, any funding mechanisms will have to be put in place in the first instance by the credit unions themselves, with the support of their members, and with agreement of the Central Bank. The Central Bank also stated that it is willing to consider the type of regulations that would be required to facilitate such proposals. However, the Central Bank's key consideration in evaluating such proposals is its statutory mandate to ensure the protection of members' savings by credit unions and to ensure the wellbeing of the sector generally.

Investment regulations made specific reference to section 43 of the Act and to further classes of investments in which a credit union may invest its funds. The regulations provide that investments in projects of a public nature include, but are not limited to, investments in social housing projects. The Central Bank is currently reviewing the investment regulations for credit unions and have published a consultation paper CP109 – Consultation on Potential Changes to the Investment Framework for Credit Unions on 11 May 2017. This consultation paper sets out potential additional investment classes that credit unions may be permitted to invest in, including certain investments in social housing. The Central Bank welcomes views on the appropriateness of these potential investment classes for credit unions and whether there may be additional investment classes which would fit within the appropriate risk profile for credit union investments. The consultation will close on 28 June 2017.

Notwithstanding any potential changes that may be made to the regulations, the legislative requirement for credit unions to ensure investments do not involve undue risk to members' savings will remain the overriding factor which must inform all credit union investment decisions.

Brexit Issues

72. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the steps the Revenue Commissioners have taken to identify possible customs posts on the Border; the locations that have been examined for these posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23604/17]

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 Governments 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 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.

Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base Negotiations

73. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with his ECOFIN colleagues in view of the recent developments in respect of the common consolidated tax base; the steps he will take to protect tax sovereignty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23605/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The European Commission's proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) was published in October 2016 and discussed at the November 2016 ECOFIN meeting. During the discussion, which was held in public session, a number of my fellow Ministers gave some initial impressions of the proposal.

At the December 2016 ECOFIN, Council Conclusions were approved in respect of the Commission's wider package which includes the CCCTB proposal but there was no specific discussion of the proposals at that meeting. There remains the possibility of further discussion at ECOFIN on CCCTB under the Maltese Presidency.

The CCCTB is a complex and detailed proposal and Member States need to analyse fully its potential impact on national tax systems. Member States have begun to discuss and debate the various aspects of the proposal in the relevant tax working parties. Ireland is engaging constructively in these discussions while continuing to assess whether it is in line with our long-term interests.

Member States maintain full sovereignty on tax matters and unanimity is required before any proposal can be agreed.

Credit Union Restructuring

74. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the establishment of the credit union advisory committee; when the first meeting of the implementation group will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23606/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) in its Review of Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report (the Report) recommended the establishment of an Implementation Group for a specified period of time to oversee and monitor implementation of its recommendations in a methodical manner and to advise the Minister for Finance on progress. The Implementation Group has now met four times.

Publication of the Report in July 2016 was just the beginning of the process. From September 2016 onwards CUAC continued working to enable a coherent implementation plan be devised and the Department worked closely with CUAC on this.

In line with CUAC's recommendations, the Department invited one nominee from each of the stakeholder groups. The Implementation Group consists of one representative from each of the following: Irish League of Credit Unions; Credit Union Development Association; Credit Union Managers' Association; National Supervisors Forum; and the Central Bank. The Implementation Group also has a CUAC representative and is chaired by the Department. This broad membership will ensure participation and contribution from all credit union perspectives.

The Implementation Group has held four monthly meetings to date, from February to May 2017 which were also attended by CUAC members. It is intended that each CUAC recommendation will be addressed separately with a view to implementation at the appropriate time. Meetings will continue to take place on a monthly basis with the next meeting scheduled for late June 2017. The term of the Implementation Group is for one year which may be extended at the discretion of the Minister. I look forward to receiving regular progress reports on the implementation of these very important recommendations.

Credit Union Services

75. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the progress his Department has made with the Central Bank on the request by a number of credit unions to expand their debit card and mortgage services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23607/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As previously referred to in Parliamentary Question number 197 on 4 April 2017, the Credit Union Act, 1997 (1997 Act) sets out the services that a credit union may provide to its members. In addition, the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016 (2016 Regulations) provides for services exempt from additional services requirements. Where a credit union wishes to provide services to its members, other than those services that are provided for under the 1997 Act or the list of services exempt from the additional services requirements set out in the 2016 Regulations, an application may be made to the Central Bank for approval to provide such additional services in accordance with the provisions in sections 48-52 of the 1997 Act.

Debit card provision (and the necessary underlying payment account service) is an additional service and as such requires Central Bank approval. The Member Personal Current Account Services (MPCAS) which provides for a current account and a range of services including payment instruments such as debit cards, has been available to eligible credit unions since October 2016. A number of credit unions have already been approved for this service which is granted under additional services provisions (sections 48 to 52) within the Credit Union Act 1997 (as amended).

There has been significant interest in this service from eligible credit unions and the Central Bank is currently processing a substantial number of additional applications. The service ap-

proval provides for a shared services support, to bridge necessary technical expertise and scale considerations. It is expected that once MPCAS is fully established and embedded, it is likely to be available to smaller credit unions with necessary risk understanding. Details of MPCAS and the approval process, along with the application requirements and related guidance are on the Central Bank's website. The Central Bank has also indicated it is open to applications for alternative debit card proposals and recommends the MPCAS framework as a template for such alternative proposals.

Currently credit unions can and some do provide mortgages to members. These type of loans are subject to certain maturity limits contained in the 2016 Regulations. Those Regulations set out the percentage of a credit union's loan book that can be outstanding for periods exceeding both five years and ten years, as well as limits on the maximum outstanding liability to an individual member. Under the 2016 Regulations credit unions continue to be allowed to lend up to 30% of their loan book over five years and up to 10% of their loan book over 10 years, subject to a maximum maturity of 25 years. In addition, credit unions can apply to the Central Bank for an extension to their longer term lending limits (up to 40% of their loan book over 5 years and up to 15% of their loan book over 10 years). Approval is subject to conditions set by the Central Bank. 12 credit unions are currently approved to avail of increased longer term lending limits.

The Central Bank informs me that the December 2016 Prudential Return indicates that for the sector overall, total gross loans over 10 years amount to c. 2.7% of total loans in the credit union sector compared to the limit of 10% (and in some cases 15%).

The Central Bank has indicated that while it can see longer term lending, including mortgages, as part of a balanced portfolio of total lending, in their analyses, credit unions need to consider the impact of longer term lending on interest margins, return on assets and on balance sheet structure – the issue of funding longer term lending with short term funding is a challenge for the credit union business model. The Central Bank further informs me that consumer mortgage lending is an activity that has its own unique risk profile, and proposals to become involved in mortgage lending in a significant way must be supported by an evidence based business case.

The Registry of Credit unions is currently developing a paper on key risk considerations for credit unions intending to engage in longer term lending/mortgages, to support their understanding of the nature of risks involved and provide a degree of clarity on minimum expectations.

The Credit Union Advisory Committee's (CUAC) recent report provides a number of recommendations, one of which is to conduct a full review of lending limits. I have established an Implementation Group which has met on four occasions and is currently assessing each of CUAC's recommendations with a view to implementing as appropriate. Central to its work is ensuring a full examination of lending limits and concentration limits is carried out as recommended. I look forward to regular progress reports from the Implementation Group as these recommendations are developed and implemented.

Tax Yield

76. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from the special domicile levy on high net worth persons; the number of persons subject to the levy; the number of non-residents paying the levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23618/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Domicile Levy was introduced in

the 2010 Finance Act and is payable on or before 31 October in the year following the valuation date on a self-assessment basis. For example the due date in respect of 2010 was 31 October 2011. The valuation date is 31 December each year. The legislation providing for the levy does not require an individual to indicate their residence on the return made to Revenue.

The following table sets out the number of persons who have filed Domicile Levy returns and the amount collected since commencement. The table excludes information on 2016, returns on which are not due until 31 October 2017.

Year	No. of Persons	Amount Collected (€m)
2010	32	€3.43
2011	33	€3.69
2012	24	€2.44
2013	20	€1.90
2014	12	€1.99
2015	13	€2.30

Tax Data

77. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated loss of income to the Exchequer in respect of bogus self-employment which forces low income workers to register as self-employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23619/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that, as there are no statistics available to it in respect of the number of individuals who would come within the terms of the Deputy's question, it is not possible to provide the estimate sought.

However, Revenue continually monitors developments to ensure that its compliance programmes, including joint initiatives with the Department of Social Protection, are tailored to meet evolving risk areas. Revenue's focus is on protecting the various income streams to the Exchequer across all tax heads, including VAT, customs duties, income tax, USC and corporation tax. Revenue conducts a full range of interventions to combat tax evasion. These include risk management interventions, Revenue Audits and Investigations, in addition to site visits. This process is aided by Revenue's Risk Evaluation Analysis and Profiling ("REAP") system and other third party data sources.

Of particular interest in the context of the Deputy's question is that in 2016 Revenue carried out a comprehensive programme of site visits in the construction sector. This involved 2,126 site visits during which 11,699 interviews were undertaken. The programme resulted in 345 reclassifications from self-employed contractors to employees, 848 employee registrations and 84 employers registering to operate PAYE.

In addition, in the course of a range of Revenue outdoor activities outside of the construction sector during 2016, Revenue activity resulted in 184 re-classifications from self-employed to employees and 1,192 employee registrations.

As the Deputy is aware, the consultation process on "the use of intermediary-type employment structures and self-employment arrangements and their impact on tax and PRSI" invited submissions from interested parties on possible measures to address the loss to the Exchequer that may arise under two sets of arrangements:

- where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide his or her services, and

- where an individual, who is dependent on, and under the control of, a single employer in the same manner as an employee, is classified as a self-employed individual.

I understand that officials from my Department and the Department of Social Protection, with technical support from Revenue, are currently in the final stages of completing a report on the consultation. As soon as the report on this process reaches me, and my colleague the Minister for Social Protection, we will consider its contents and then I expect we will publish it.

Stability and Growth Pact

78. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he has made progress in the reform of EU fiscal rules in view of allowing capital investment and the ongoing review of the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23620/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The fiscal rules - formally known as the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) - have direct application through a number of EU regulations. Changes to these regulations would have to follow the normal EU approach starting with a proposal from the Commission before consideration by Member States and the European Parliament.

However, there are matters within the SGP subject to the discretion of the European Commission. The Commission regularly issues updated guidance on how it will implement the SGP. It is in this context that I sought and secured a major change from the Commission in achieving an annual update of the reference rate used in the expenditure benchmark. The former practice had been to fix the reference rates for three years at a time. This new approach significantly increases the permitted room for expenditure growth, which would not have been possible under the former practice. In line with the principle of equal treatment for all Member States, the annual update of reference rates applied to all Member States.

The SGP also includes flexibilities that are designed to promote capital investment. For instance, within the expenditure benchmark, capital formation increases are smoothed over four years with the result that only one quarter of the increase in public investment must be funded in the first year from within the fiscal space. This provision, which means increases in capital spending for housing and other purposes can be front-loaded within the EU rules, has been utilised in Ireland's budgetary plans.

It should also be noted that there are other flexibility provisions within the rules designed to encourage capital investment. These are the investment clause and the structural reform clause. Specifically, these provisions allow for temporary deviations from the required structural budgetary adjustment if spending on capital investment can be shown to qualify for either the investment clause or the structural reform clause. Both of these provisions are subject to strict conditions; and while Ireland has not yet been in a position to apply given where we are in the business cycle, the situation is kept under constant review by my officials.

The Government is very conscious of the need to boost the supply of critical infrastructure. Investment in public infrastructure is vital for the medium and long-term competitiveness of the economy as well as for underpinning social cohesion through the provision of vital services to people in the form of schools, public transport, housing, etc. The public capital plan provides for €42 billion of capital investment up to 2021 and the Government remains committed to this. Further to this the Government set out in the 2016 Summer Economic Statement proposals for an additional cumulative €5.1 billion in capital spending over the period 2017 -2021. From this additional capital, €2.2 billion was allocated to the Government's initiatives aimed at

tackling the housing crisis, as detailed in the Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Taking account of further allocations made in Budget 2017, approximately €2.65 billion remains to be allocated over the period 2018 - 2021.

In addition, the Government has been exploring the objective to create ‘off-balance’ mechanisms that bring investment into social housing which is additional to the funding being provided directly by the State. There is ongoing engagement with a broad array of domestic actors and European authorities to explore achievable solutions.

The Capital Plan is now being reviewed to ensure that capital spending is strictly aligned with national economic and social priorities, consistent with Programme for Partnership Government objectives. This includes examining how available capital funds can best be allocated to underpin sustainable medium-term economic growth and future growth potential.

The process will comprise a focused review of priorities aimed primarily at advising Government, in the context of Budget 2018, on how the additional capital funding committed by Government should be allocated over the remainder of the plan. This will examine priority areas for investment, consistent with the objectives of the existing Capital Plan and the specific investment priorities contained in the Programme for Government.

Finally, I would point out that we are still running a deficit and our public debt remains high by international standards. The answer, therefore, is not simply about spending more; it is about getting more from each euro of taxpayers’ money that is spent.

Exchequer Returns

79. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for taxes which his Department has identified as being behind profile in view of the failure of the recent Exchequer returns to meet profile as set out in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23621/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The following table below provides a breakdown of the various tax-heads performance at end-April 2017 against published profile.

Tax-head	End-April 2017 Outturn €m	End-April 2017 Target €m	Excess/Shortfall €m	Excess/Shortfall %
Income Tax (Including USC)	6,179	6,378	-198	-3.1
VAT	4,768	4,511	257	5.7
Corporation Tax	587	811	-223	27.6
Excise Duties	1,740	1,858	-177	-6.3
Stamp Duties	290	368	-78	-21.2
Capital Gains Tax	106	105	1	0.7
Capital Acquisition Tax	58	60	-2	-4.0
Customs	98	109	-12	-10.8
Local Property Tax	253	248	6	2.3

Tax-head	End-April 2017 Outturn €m	End-April 2017 Target €m	Excess/Shortfall €m	Excess/Shortfall %
Other	24	0	24	-
Total	14,104	14,447	-344	-2.4

The position is that cumulative Exchequer tax revenues at the end of April 2017 were slightly below profile, coming in just 2.4% or €344 million under expectations. In terms of the “Big 4” tax heads, corporation tax, income tax and excise duties recorded shortfalls against profile, while VAT was ahead of target.

Corporation tax receipts of €587 million were collected to end-April. As a result, cumulative revenues were down 27.6% or €223 million against target. It is important to point out that Exchequer receipts from corporation tax can vary throughout the year and just over 10% of the total annual receipts was expected in the first four months. By comparison, over 60% of corporation tax receipts are expected during May, June and November. Due to the non-linear nature of corporation tax receipts, the potential for company-specific factors and the low proportion of the annual receipts received to date, it would be premature to draw any conclusions about corporate tax at this stage of the year.

Income tax receipts to the end of April were 3.1% or €198 million below profile. It is important to point out that income tax encompasses a broad range of elements, some of which are not directly impacted by employment or wage developments. These include Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Life Assurance Exit Tax, Dividend Withholding Tax, Professional Services Withholding Tax and Back Duty. These payments, by their nature, can be non-linear and timing can vary from year to year. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the majority of these specific components are having a drag on overall income tax receipts in the first four months of 2017.

Notwithstanding this, the performance of USC is lower-than-expected, and my Department is currently reviewing its performance, in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners. The initial indications are that the Revenue Commissioners are satisfied that the overall estimate of the Budget 2017 package in respect of USC changes was costed accurately at €335 million.

At the time of Budget 2017, the apportionment of the total USC package between PAYE and Schedule D was expected to be €263 million and €72 million respectively, in line with previous norms. However, subsequent analysis by Revenue, indicates that the allocation of the USC package between PAYE and Schedule D should have been €311 million and €24 million respectively, due to the dynamics of the USC package. While, this helps to explain the current under-performance against profile for USC paid by PAYE taxpayers, it is important to point out that this reapportionment should have no adverse impact on the overall collection of USC receipts as this should equalize later in the year, when self-employed returns are made.

Furthermore, as part of the continuous efforts to improve the Department’s tax forecasting performance, the ESRI and my Department jointly examined the sensitivity of income tax and USC revenues to changes in income. As a result of this work which was published in March 2017, the Department has revised the income tax and USC revenue elasticities used in the forecasting process. This will affect these forecasts from 2018 onwards.

Significantly, the Revenue Commissioners have also informed me that PAYE, the most important component of overall income tax, has closed the first third of the year, broadly in-line with profile, and is up 7.9% year-on-year, which is consistent with the improving labour market.

Receipts from Excise duties amounted to €1,740 million in the first four months of the year

and were 6.3% or €117 million below profile. The under-performance is evident across a broad range of excise components, while others such as vehicle registration tax remains in line with profile for the year to date.

In relation to Stamp duties, receipts of €290 million were collected to end-April 2017, which represents a 21.2% or €78 million shortfall against target. The under-performance in the year-to-date, is primarily due to property and shares transactions. However, it is important to point out that while both components are currently below target, they are up in year-on-year terms.

With regards to other minor taxes, these are generally broadly in line with profile. Finally, my Department along with the Revenue Commissioners will continue to examine these tax-heads and consider all relevant developments.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications for the help-to-buy scheme; the amount it has cost to date; the value of homes acquired through the scheme below €200,000, €250,000, €300,000, €350,000, €400,000 and €450,000 respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23622/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There were 6,084 applications for the Help to Buy (HTB) incentive up to 11 May 2017; in the same period there were 1,677 claims.

The following table sets out the numbers of applications for the incentive.

Application Stage	2016	2017	Total
Stage 1: Applications made (approved)	1,041	2,580	3,621
Stage 1: Applications made (pending)	272	2,191	2,463
Stage 2: Claims made	894	783	1,667

The purpose of the application stage of the HTB process is to allow would-be first-time buyers to determine whether, and to what extent, they qualify for the incentive.

In the above table “pending” means that the applicants either have to file an outstanding return or address a compliance issue, the application is to be reviewed by a Revenue caseworker, or the applicant needs to finalise his or her application. The processing time for pending applications depends on the time it takes an applicant to resolve any outstanding matters and Revenue is encouraging prospective applicants to file any necessary tax returns and resolve any outstanding issues before making the HTB application. The bulk of applicants to date are PAYE taxpayers and if a Form 12 tax return is outstanding it can be filed online very quickly by using “PAYE Services” in myAccount. If there is a tax liability outstanding it can be paid using the ‘Payments’ facility in myAccount. A HTB application can be approved automatically, and very quickly, on the online system where there are no outstanding issues.

Once an application is successful, the time taken for the claim to be submitted depends on the claimant. If he or she has the necessary evidence, which is a signed contract, mortgage agreement, deposit details, details of the property for first-time purchasers or, in the case of first-time self-build claimants, evidence of drawdown of the first tranche of the mortgage, the claim can be submitted. However, many applicants may never proceed to make a claim. Reasons for not making a claim include; individuals who do not go on to obtain mortgage approval, applicants may decide to purchase a second-hand property, or in situations where applicants are

not able to source the new home that they desire.

There have been 1,677 claims to date.

More detailed information and guidance regarding the requirements for the scheme is available on the Revenue website.

The estimated total value of HTB claims paid to 11 May 2017 (including claims in respect of 2016) is €17.2 million. This represents approximately 70% of the claims made.

Value of homes

Revenue publishes HTB house value statistics in bands of €75,000 from €150,000 to €450,000. The following table sets out the most recent statistics (to 11 May 2017).

Value	Number of claims
€0-150,000	47
€151-225,000	249
€226-300,000	579
€301-375,000	484
€376-450,000	210
Over €450,000	108
Total	1,677

HTB incentive statistics, including information on the value of properties availing of the incentive, are updated regularly by the Revenue Commissioners and can be accessed on their website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/htb-incentive-stats.html>.

Stamp Duty

81. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of stamp duty paid by a company (details supplied) for the 7,000 loans if bought from IBRC. [23623/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that by virtue of the taxpayer confidentiality obligations imposed by section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, they are prohibited from disclosing the information requested by the Deputy.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

82. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding tax relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23626/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the applicable provision giving a right to repayment of tax is section 865 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, where a person has paid an amount of tax which is not due. However, section 865(4) of the TCA provides that that right is subject to the making of a claim within a statutory limit of four years after the end of the chargeable period to which the claim relates. That statutory limit is binding on Revenue as well as on taxpayers.

Section 865 was introduced in 2003 and provides a statutory general right to repayment of tax as well as payment of interest, subject to the four year time limit. It provides that no repayment may be made based on claims submitted more than four years after the end of the period

to which they relate. Prior to its introduction there was no statutory right to repayment.

At the same time as section 865 was introduced, Revenue's general right to raise assessments or make enquiries as respects taxpayer returns was also reduced to four years, except in certain circumstances where Revenue's right to enquire or raise assessments is not time limited, for example where fraud or neglect is suspected or in the context of the application of general anti-avoidance rules. Previously, the general time limit on the raising of assessments by Revenue had been ten years.

The Minister at the time indicated that, in introducing the new arrangements, he was satisfied that they achieved the necessary balance between establishing a fair and uniform system for taxpayers while providing necessary protection for the Exchequer.

While I am satisfied that that continues to be the position I will ask my officials to examine the issue.

NAMA Loans Sale

83. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance further to a statement (details supplied) by NAMA's head of residential delivery to the Committee of Public Accounts on 25 October 2016, the NAMA loan sales that were initiated by reverse inquiry; the names of the loan sales and the successful bidders, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23645/17]

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

Loan sale	Purchaser
Eagle	Cerberus
Aspen	Starwood
Holly	Lonestar
Tower	Blackstone
Spring	Deutsche
Maeve	Deutsche
Boyne	Deutsche
Jewel	Hammerson/Allianz
Abbey	Apollo

I am advised that, of the nine significant loan sales which have been triggered by credible reverse inquiries, in only three out the nine cases has the party that made the original reverse inquiry been the successful bidder after a competitive sales process involving other bidders.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

84. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are investigating financial matters relating to its brief at Templemore college in view of the ongoing issues relating to the audit report that were discussed at the Committee of Public Accounts over the past two weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23721/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that by virtue of the taxpayer confidentiality obligations imposed by section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation

Act 1997, they are prohibited from commenting on the matter referred to by the Deputy.

Exchequer Returns

85. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if the proceeds of moneys captured in criminal drug hauls are included in GDP figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23822/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In general, certain illegal activities such as drug smuggling and prostitution are recorded as part of GDP. A requirement to include such activities in the National Accounts has existed since the European System of Accounts (ESA) 1995 version of the standards were introduced. However, lack of data sources for the relevant illegal activities caused measurement issues for all EU Member States. As a result, a transversal (EU-wide) GNI reservation was placed on all member states and required comprehensive estimates for these activities to be produced. Estimates were produced in September 2014 and the reservation has been lifted, which also coincided with the introduction of the ESA 2010 standards.

However, the proceeds of money captured in criminal drug hauls does not relate to production and as a result would not be included in GDP. It is treated in the National Accounts as a fine and recorded as a current transfer.

Sale of State Assets

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the differences in terms of Eurostat rules or other restrictions in terms of the use of proceeds, between the sale of State assets such as Aer Lingus and Bord Gáis and the pending sale of a share in a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23829/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is no functional difference between the terms of use for the proceeds of the sale of Aer Lingus and proceeds from the partial disposal of AIB shares. In statistical terms, the disposal of the shares is considered a financial transaction, meaning that the proceeds will not be recognised as general government revenue and will not improve the general government balance. Proceeds from the disposal of shares would, in the first instance, go to the ISIF. These can then be transferred on to the Exchequer if the Minister for Finance so directs.

These type of transactions do not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance (GGB) under the European System of Accounts 2010 (ESA 2010) framework. This is due to the fact that it is classified as a ‘financial transaction’ whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash).

Subsequent to the sale of Aer Lingus, a ‘Connectivity Fund’ was formed to invest the €335 million proceeds from the sale of the State’s shareholding in Aer Lingus with the aim of enabling and enhancing Ireland’s physical, virtual and energy connectivity. This fund is overseen by the ISIF which, as the Deputy will be aware, has a strict commercial mandate.

The Bord Gáis sale was treated differently as it was not the sale of a State asset. Rather, Bord Gáis made a decision to sell an asset and remitted the proceeds to the State as dividends. As these payments were “at or below the entrepreneurial income” of Bord Gáis they passed the Super Dividend test (ESA 2010, 20.206) and, as such, were recorded as dividends. Dividends

are recorded as property income in the ESA framework. Therefore these dividend payments were recorded as General Government Revenue and thus improved the General Government Balance.

Sale of State Assets

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which proceeds will be treated within the ISIF and the NTMA following the sale of a portion of the State's share in a bank (details supplied); if it is technically possible from a Eurostat perspective to transfer the proceeds to the discretionary portfolio within the ISIF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23830/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have previously stated for the Deputy in Parliamentary Question number 87 of the 09/03/2017 the proceeds from the partial disposal of AIB shares would, in the first instance, go to the ISIF. Such proceeds can then be transferred on to the Exchequer if the Minister for Finance so directs. In statistical terms, the disposal of shares will be a financial transaction, which means that the proceeds will not be recognised as general government revenue and will not improve the general government balance.

Regarding the sale of financial assets, these type of transactions do not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance (GGB) under the European System of Accounts 2010 (ESA 2010) framework. This is due to the fact that it is classified as a 'financial transaction' whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently, the sale of any shareholding in Allied Irish Bank (AIB) would not count as general government revenue. Accordingly, if the proceeds are then used for general government expenditure at any time, the general government balance will worsen. If the proceeds are lodged to the Exchequer, then the NTMA will, in the normal course of events, take them into account in their funding plans and, all things being equal, it would result in Ireland's Exchequer borrowing requirement reducing and, consequently, Ireland's gross debt and debt to GDP ratio being reduced.

A lower level of debt is not only beneficial in terms of the fiscal sustainability of the State but would also result in reduced interest payments in future years. The strategy of reducing the national debt is consistent with the Government policy of repaying the borrowing previously undertaken to finance the recapitalisation of the banking sector during the financial crisis. It is my view, therefore, that because public indebtedness rose partly due to the recapitalisation of the Banks, it is appropriate to use one-off revenue from divesting the State of its banking assets to reduce debt

Protected Disclosures Data

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of protected disclosures that were made to the Central Bank in each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number that led to further investigation from the Central Bank; the number which led to findings being made by the Central Bank against the financial institutions; the penalties imposed by the Central Bank for each of the successful cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23831/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): New protections for persons making protected disclosures to the Central Bank came into force on 1 August 2013. This also intro-

duced new obligations on certain categories of persons in regulated firms to disclose breaches of financial services legislation to the Central Bank. The Central Bank has established a whistleblower desk and put in place policies and procedures to ensure that such disclosures are dealt with appropriately. The Central Bank also has a designated channel through which it receives various protected disclosure reports from people external to the Central Bank (members of the public, employees working in regulated firms etc.) regarding alleged breaches or contraventions of financial services legislation by financial services entities. The Central Bank considers the receipt of such protected disclosure reports as an important supervisory tool in allowing members of the public or staff members of regulated entities to provide such reports in a confidential form to the Central Bank.

The number of protected disclosures made to the Central Bank from 1 August 2013 to year end 2013 was 10, 42 in 2014, 49 in 2015, 50 in 2016 and in excess of 40 to date in 2017.

As outlined on page 60 of the Central Bank's 2016 Annual Report, various supervisory actions have been initiated following the receipt of protected disclosures reports including: enforcement action, on-site inspections conducted, Risk Mitigation Plans issued and firms placed on a watch list. Not all reports received will result in supervisory action being initiated as the information may not be sufficient to take action; or the information received was not substantiated when investigated; or information was provided anonymously and contact for further supporting information could not be made.

The Central Bank is currently considering approximately 50 whistleblower allegations.

The Bank has not provided the penalties imposed on foot of protected disclosures. However, the Bank imposed fines totalling €12.05 million in 2016, the largest figure for fines imposed by the Bank in a single year to date. A fine of €4.5 million was imposed on Springboard Mortgages Limited for serious failings in its obligations to tracker mortgage customers.

Since 2006, 108 Settlement Agreements have been reached for regulatory breaches, with fines totalling approximately €57 million. The notices for all Settlement Agreements are published on the Central Bank's website: <https://www.centralbank.ie/news-media/legal-notice/settlement-agreements>

Cyber Security Policy

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money spent in his Department and in the State entities under the remit of his Department on cyber security in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of employees dedicated to cyber security in the same entities; the number of job vacancies in the area of cyber security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23832/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the Deputy is interested in cyber security arrangements for my Department and a number of Bodies under the Aegis of my Department, namely the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), the Central Bank, the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

In relation to my Department, I wish to advise that ICT services are provided by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. On behalf of my Department, the OGCIO implements a multi-layered approach to cyber security and to protecting ICT systems, infrastructures, and services. The threat landscape is constantly evolving and significant effort is expended to continually enhance and strengthen ICT security to mitigate against emerging threats, risks, vulnerabilities and cyberse-

curity issues. In addition to deploying intrusion protection systems, software vulnerabilities are managed by maintaining up-to-date versions. OGCI also continues to work closely with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). The NCSC is a division of the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment and encompasses the State's national/governmental Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT-IE).

In relation to the Bodies under the Aegis of my Department as requested, I am advised of the following responses from three of the Bodies as set out as follows. It was not possible for the National Treasury Management Agency to provide the information sought in the time available and therefore I will make arrangements to provide the outstanding information in line with Standing Orders.

Central Bank of Ireland

The Central Bank does not comment on its IT security arrangements. The Bank actively monitors potential threats and implements measures wherever possible to prevent threats to its information security.

Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau/ Financial Services Ombudsman Council

The Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau and the Financial Services Ombudsman's Council apply a multi-layered strategy to cyber-security. The threat landscape is constantly evolving and significant effort is expended to continually enhance and strengthen ICT security to mitigate against emerging threats, risks, vulnerabilities and cybersecurity issues. In addition to deploying intrusion protection systems, software vulnerabilities are managed by maintaining up-to-date versions.

Office of the Revenue Commissioners

Revenue implements a very comprehensive approach to cyber security to protect technical infrastructure, tax-payer data and services. Revenue Data centres operate at and are independently audited to the ISO27001 standard for IT security and ISO22301 for business continuity. Security is fundamental to all of our online services and built-in to all our systems from the design stage. Amongst the numerous initiatives taken to reduce the risk are the careful design of hardware and software architectures, firewalls, intrusion protection systems, penetration testing, hardening of operating systems and maintaining software patch levels etc. As a result of this integrated approach, it is very difficult to specifically cost the spending on cyber security on an annual basis.

IT security is a key role for all Revenue IT staff. Revenue has a number of specialised technical teams that constantly monitor all systems and evaluate the dangers posed by new and existing threats and take appropriate actions as required. These Revenue ICT staff also work closely with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the OGCI in evaluating the threat landscape.

Home Repossessions Rate

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to deal with home repossessions by the main lending institutions, their subsidiaries and others in view of the implications for homelessness; his further plans for a new code of conduct for financial institutions to ensure an easing of the regulations in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23866/17]

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if the lending institutions have indicated to him the extent to which home repossessions are likely in the twelve months from May 2017; if steps will be taken to ensure the retention of the family home in circumstances in which borrowers continue to make payments up to and exceeding one third of the person's disposable income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23867/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 91 together.

The Government attaches great importance to the resolution of mortgage arrears and wants to keep families in their homes and avoid repossessions insofar as possible. The Deputy will be aware of the recent establishment of the Abhaile mortgage arrears resolution service to ensure that those either in mortgage arrears or at risk of going into mortgage arrears on their primary residence are able to access State-funded professional legal or financial advice on their resolution options.

The Deputy will also know that the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) sets out statutory requirements for mortgage lenders and credit servicing firms dealing with borrowers in or facing arrears on the mortgage loan secured by their primary residence.

Lenders may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of the borrower's primary residence after it follows a number of steps. The steps include:

- Making every reasonable effort under the CCMA to agree an alternative restructure arrangement (ARA) with the borrower;
- time bound requirements to inform the borrower the regulated entity is not willing to offer an ARA and of his/her options;
- time bound requirements to inform a borrower, who is not willing to enter into an ARA, of his/her options; and
- Inform the borrower of a decision to classify the borrower as non-cooperating.

Last year I wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank to request that an assessment be undertaken of the range of available sustainable restructure solutions offered by banks and non-bank entities. The Central Bank completed its assessment and their report is published on the Department of Finance website. The assessment finds a comprehensive range of available restructuring solutions being offered and delivered by both bank and non-bank entities and notes considerable progress in addressing mortgage arrears since the peak. The Central Bank notes further that there is strong evidence that both banks and non-banks look to exhaust available restructure options before moving to the legal process. In addition, the Central Bank considers the range of restructures offered by banks to be broadly appropriate in balancing consumer protection imperatives, and maintaining a mortgage market for all borrowers, and a functioning banking system.

I have no information with respect to the anticipated level of repossessions for the coming year, Court activity levels being a matter which comes under the responsibility of my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice & Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD. It is important to also note that the commencement of the court process is not a signal that a repossession will occur – it may often be the case that the process then prompts borrowers to re-engage with their bank and to find a solution. Often these cases are adjourned to allow both parties time to find a sustainable solution.

In conclusion I would draw the Deputy's attention to Mortgage Arrears and Restruc-

tures Data released by the Central Bank on 13 March, which shows that to end-Q4 2016, the number of mortgage accounts in arrears for principal dwelling houses (PDH) has declined for the last fourteen quarters. Almost 121,000 PDH accounts were also classified as restructured, of which some 87 per cent were reported to be meeting the terms of their arrangement. It is clear that where a borrower actively engages with their lender it is more likely that an equitable arrangement will be found and that the borrower will be able to remain in their family home.

Economic Growth Rate

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if the economy continues to meet its social and economic targets in line with all others within the EU and eurozone; his views on whether corrective measures are required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23868/17]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if the economy meets its performance targets under the main economic headings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23869/17]

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the basic fundamental indicators remain positive and constant for the economy notwithstanding the potential threat of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23872/17]

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the strength of the main economic indicators in view of the challenges of the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23876/17]

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the economy remains economically competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23879/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 93, 96, 99 and 102 together.

In general, recent indicators have been very positive, indicating that the economic recovery is continuing at a robust pace. The preliminary estimate for full-year GDP growth in 2016 is 5.2 per cent, based on National Accounts data for the fourth quarter of the year, making Ireland the fastest growing economy in the European Union again last year.

Importantly, domestic demand made a strong positive contribution to growth in 2016 with consumption increasing by 3.0 per cent. This is crucial as domestic sectors are both jobs-rich and tax-rich. This is consistent with the strong labour market performance last year with employment increasing by 2.9 per cent (56,000 jobs) in 2016 on an annual basis. As a result, the unemployment rate fell to 7.9 per cent in 2016.

Recent data published indicate that robust growth in the domestic economy has continued in 2017:

- The volume of retail sales increased by 2.9 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2017. Core sales (excluding motor trades) were up by 5.9 per cent over the same period.

- Expansion in the construction sector continued in April with the Purchasing Managers' Index for the sector recording its forty-fourth successive month of expansion.

- The Consumer Sentiment Index rose slightly to 102.0 in April 2017, from 101.9 in March.

The index remains well above its long run average.

- The seasonally-adjusted monthly unemployment rate for April was 6.2 per cent, down from 8.4 per cent in April 2016. As a result, the unemployment rate has fallen by 9 per cent since its peak of over 15 per cent in early-2012.

Further, the exporting sector appears to be holding up well despite the weakness in sterling with the value of merchandise exports increasing by 10.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2017 year-on-year. The latest data also show that Ireland continued to record a large current account surplus last year of 4.7 per cent of GDP.

An important factor in strong export performance is competitiveness. In this regard, significant progress has been made in recent years. The latest figures from the Central Bank of Ireland, show that Ireland's real harmonised competitiveness indicator (a widely used measure of competitiveness in Europe) has improved by over 20 per cent between 2008 and March 2017.

The gains in Irish competitiveness achieved since 2008 have been hard-won through productivity improvements and wage and price moderation. It is important that this competitiveness is preserved and continues to support growth. This is all the more important given the several sources of uncertainty which could negatively impact on the economic outlook. In particular, the UK's decision to leave the EU has added to concerns about the international outlook while the change in policy direction by the new US administration has also added to concerns about the international economy. Weaker than expected trading partner growth would negatively impact on Irish growth through reduced exports.

In summary, I am confident that significant economic progress can be made in the years ahead. This positive outlook is reflected in the latest forecasts published by my Department in the Stability Programme Update for 2017. My Department is projecting robust growth this year of 4.3 per cent while medium term growth is expected to average around 3 per cent per annum. The labour market recovery is also set to continue with robust employment growth projected over the coming years and, on this basis, by the end of this decade there will be more people at work in Ireland than ever before. However, such progress is critically contingent upon implementing appropriate policies and that is what this Government will continue to do.

Motor Insurance Regulation

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the benefits of the review of the motor insurance sector for motorists in terms of reduced premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23870/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group, chaired by Minister of State, Eoghan Murphy T.D in July 2016. This Working Group is examining the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identifying what short, medium and long-term measures can be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance premiums and a broad range of issues affecting the cost of motor insurance were examined.

The Working Group finalised its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in December 2016 and it was published on 10 January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Govern-

ment Departments and Agencies with the 71 action points due to be implemented by the end of 2018 and 45 scheduled for completion before the conclusion of this year. There is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly reports on its progress and the first such report is available on the Department's website at: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/170503%20Insurance%20Q2%202017%20Progress%20Report%20Q1%20Focus.pdf>

This update reports how the implementation of the recommendations is progressing, with a particular focus on action points which were due for completion during the first quarter. Completed actions include the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission and the issuing of a key aggregated metrics template to insurance undertakings for completion.

There is no simple or single solution to the problem of increasing insurance prices. However, it is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, should achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers.

It should be noted that the latest data from the Central Statistics Office indicates that there has been no month-on-month increase in the cost of motor insurance during the first four months of this year, while there was a decrease of 2.6% in April 2017 compared to the same month last year.

Pension Provisions

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to facilitate pensioners who have made contributions under the defined benefits regime and have been forced into AMRFs unless they are in receipt of a separate pension of €12,700 per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23871/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Members of defined benefit (DB) pension schemes who have the option of putting funds accumulated under their DB scheme into an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF) on retirement are required, as is the case with members of defined contribution pension arrangements, to invest those funds in an Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF) or use the funds to purchase an annuity in certain circumstances.

Where an individual chooses the ARF option, is under the age of 75 and does not meet the requirement of having a minimum guaranteed pension income for life of €12,700 per annum in payment, he or she is required to set aside an amount of €63,500 (or the remainder of the pension fund if less than €63,500 after taking a retirement lump sum) by investing the amount in an AMRF or by the purchase of an annuity. The purpose of the AMRF is to ensure that an individual, without the minimum guaranteed pension income for life, has a capital nest-egg to provide for the latter years of his or her retirement.

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

I have no plans to alter these provisions.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 92.

Tax Yield

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the reduction in tax receipts in the first quarter of 2017; the extent to which the matter has been examined by his Department to identify the causes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23874/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position is that cumulative Exchequer tax revenues at the end of March 2017 were slightly below profile, coming in just 2.4% or €282 million under expectations. In terms of the “Big 4” tax headings, corporation tax, income tax and excise duties recorded shortfalls against profile, but VAT was ahead of expectations.

Corporation tax receipts of €520 million were collected to end-March. As a result, cumulative revenues were down 25.3% or €177 million against target. It is important to point out that Exchequer receipts from corporation tax can vary throughout the year, with just over 5% of the total annual receipts expected in the first quarter. By comparison, over 60% of corporation tax receipts are expected during May, June and November. Due to the non-linear nature of corporation tax receipts, the potential for company-specific factors and the low proportion of the annual receipts received to date, it would be premature to draw any conclusions about corporate tax at this stage of the year.

Income tax receipts to the end of March were 3.9% or €180 million below profile. It is important to point out that income tax encompasses a broad range of elements, some of which are not directly impacted by employment or wage developments. These include Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Life Assurance Exit Tax, Dividend Withholding Tax, Professional Services Withholding Tax and Back Duty. These payments, by their nature, can be non-linear and timing can vary from year to year. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the majority of these specific components are having a drag on overall income tax receipts in the first quarter of 2017.

Notwithstanding this, the performance of USC is lower-than-expected, and my Department is currently reviewing its performance, in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners. The initial indications are that the Revenue Commissioners are satisfied that the overall estimate of the Budget 2017 package in respect of USC changes was costed accurately at €335 million.

At the time of Budget 2017, the apportionment of the total USC package between PAYE and Schedule D was expected to be €263 million and €72 million respectively, in line with previous norms. However, subsequent analysis by Revenue, indicates that the allocation of the USC package between PAYE and Schedule D should have been €311 million and €24 million respectively, due to the dynamics of the USC package. While, this helps to explain the current under-performance against profile for USC paid by PAYE taxpayers, it is important to point out that this reapportionment should have no adverse impact on the overall collection of USC receipts as this should equalize later in the year, when self-employed returns are made.

Furthermore, as part of the continuous efforts to improve the Department’s tax forecasting performance, the ESRI and my Department jointly examined the sensitivity of income tax and USC revenues to changes in income. As a result of this work which was published in March 2017, the Department has revised the income tax and USC revenue elasticities used in the forecasting process. This will affect these forecasts from 2018 onwards.

Significantly, the Revenue Commissioners have also informed me that PAYE, the most important component of overall income tax, closed the first quarter of the year, just below profile, down 2%. However, in year-on-year terms receipts were up 6%, which is consistent with the improving labour market.

Receipts from Excise duties amounted to €1,277 million in the first three months of the year and were 6.6% or €91 million below profile. The under-performance was evident across a broad range of excise components, while others such as the vehicle registration tax remains in line with profile for the year to date.

In relation to Stamp duties, receipts of €223 million were collected to end-March 2017, which represents a 15.1% or €40 million shortfall against target. The under-performance in the first quarter of 2017, is primarily due to property and shares transactions. However, it is important to point out that both components were up in year-on-year terms at March 2017.

With regards to other minor taxes, these are generally broadly in line with profile. Finally, I can assure the Deputy, that my Department along with the Revenue Commissioners will continue to examine these tax-heads and consider all relevant developments.

Credit Availability

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if working capital remains available to small and medium sized businesses with particular reference to sole traders or companies wishing to extend their customer base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23875/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, supporting SMEs in terms of access to finance has been a cornerstone policy for Government in our efforts to rebuild the economy and bring back jobs. Government policy is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. In this regard the Government has developed a number of initiatives to ensure that the supply of credit in the market is sufficient to meet the existing and future needs of SMEs.

In terms of monitoring the working capital requirements for SMEs, my Department commissions biannual surveys to ascertain the demand for credit by SMEs. This survey series, most recently conducted by Behaviour & Attitudes on behalf of my Department, is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering 1,500 respondents and involving over 6,000 direct telephone calls to SMEs. SMEs of all sizes trading in all sectors, excluding property development and speculative activities, are included. The survey covers demand for credit from both bank and non-bank sources.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the most recently published Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period April to September 2016, which can be found at www.finance.gov.ie. The results of this survey shows that, when pending applications are excluded, 84% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Purchases, replacement or lease of new vehicle/equipment is now provided as the main reason for applying for bank finance with 29% stating this is why they requested bank finance. Working capital/cash flow requirements were provided as the second highest reason for applying for bank finance with 27% of respondents stating that they required finance for this purpose. When asked about sources of finance for working capital, internal funds/retained earnings were the main finance source of working capital with 73% of working capital coming from this source (up 6%). The survey also showed continued positive trends in terms of trading performance, profitability and employment.

The SME State Bodies Group, chaired by my Department, provides a forum for the development and implementation of policy measures to enhance SMEs' access to a stable and

appropriate supply of finance. As the Deputy will be aware, the Action Plan for Jobs over the past number of years has set out a range of commitments to ensure viable SMEs can access appropriate finance at a reasonable cost from both bank and non-bank sources.

A key objective of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is to ensure that SMEs can access low cost flexible loans from a variety of sources. The SBCI channels its funds through lending partners known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank on-lending partners and five non-bank on-lending partners. The SBCI has a current funding capacity of €1.05 billion which it makes available to its on-lending partners as demand from SMEs arises. To the end of 2016, a total of €544 million has been lent to over 12,593 SMEs and the SBCI has committed a total of €906 million to its eight on-lending partners. In 2017, the SBCI will continue to make significant funding available to SMEs across Ireland.

The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, is an additional source of credit that provides loans for up to €25,000 to start-up, newly established, or growing micro enterprises employing less than 10 people.

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

The Government remains committed to the SME sector and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth. I can assure the Deputy that my Department, working with other relevant Departments, Bodies and Agencies, such as the Credit Review Office, will continue to advance policies to ensure the availability of both bank and non-bank credit so as to ensure that viable Irish SMEs have sufficient access to finance.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 92.

Mortgage Interest Rates

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason home borrowers continue to pay more in interest on their home mortgages compared to those in other euro-zone countries with less favourable economic achievements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23877/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Although Ireland is in a monetary union with other Euro area Member States, it has to be acknowledged that there are many factors, such as differences in national legal and housing systems, cultural preferences, language, the proximity of lenders to borrowers, which will continue to inhibit the full integration of the residential mortgage market, and of mortgage interest rates, in the Euro area and the wider EU. More directly, differences in the nature of mortgage and other credit markets, credit and market conditions, mortgage default rates and the funding of mortgage credit will also impact on the levels of mortgage lending rates between and within different countries.

However, there have been some developments which seek to promote a more harmonised market for credit across the EU. In particular, the 2014 Mortgage Credit Directive, which has now been transposed into Irish law by the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016, seeks to develop a more harmonised, efficient and competitive internal market for the provision of residential mortgages to consumer borrowers and this should help to promote the closer integration of EU mortgage markets over time.

In terms of the national context, the issue of the level of variable mortgage rates is an important one for this Government and it is committed to reducing the cost of secured mortgage lending and promoting competition in the supply of mortgage finance. To that end, I have requested the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to work with the Central Bank to set out the options for Government in terms of market structure, legislation and regulation to lower the cost of secured mortgage lending and improve the degree of competition and consumer protection. The CCPC has already commenced this work and has conducted a public consultation to gather views about the future of the Irish mortgage market. Based on this public consultation, it is expected that the CCPC will produce a final report outlining their proposals by the end of this month.

In overall terms, the Government is of the opinion that a healthy banking system which delivers increased competition is the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are driven down in a sustainable way for the market as a whole but without giving rise to potentially undesirable consequences for the provision of new mortgage lending. This is a policy area that the Government will keep under active review in its ongoing engagement with mortgage lenders and in implementing the Programme for Government commitments to help deliver on a long term basis better outcomes for all mortgage borrowers.

Tax Code

101. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce tax on the construction sector with a view to bringing down the cost of houses, in particular for first time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23878/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): VAT is governed by the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. While most economic activity is subject to the standard VAT rate of 23%. Construction services already avail of the reduced VAT rate of 13.5%. Ireland has historically applied the 13.5% reduced rate of VAT to all construction services under a derogation from the EU VAT Directive.

The Programme for Partnership Government committed to ask the Oireachtas to consider the merits of a temporary targeted reduction of the rate of VAT from 13.5% to 9% on new, affordable houses and apartments, both public and private, timed to generate the maximum impact on supply and to target principally the purchasers of affordable homes. In its Report of June 2016, the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness reviewed the costs of construction including VAT, in the light of the Programme for Partnership Government commitment. They recommend that the Housing Agency annually review construction costs but did not recommend that the VAT rate on new residential property be reduced.

Ahead of last year's Budget I decided that relief would be better operated through the income tax rather than the VAT system, as applying the 9% VAT rate to the construction of new residential properties would involve having two separate VAT rates applying to construction services.

As the deputy will be aware, I introduced the Help-to-Buy incentive in Budget 2017 to help encourage the building of additional new homes. That scheme will run until the end of 2019.

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 92.

Inflation Rate

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has identified inflationary tendencies within the economy; his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23880/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Over the past few years consumer price inflation has been near zero in Ireland and in the euro area more generally. In 2016 annual inflation in Ireland - as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) was slightly negative at -0.2 per cent.

However, in Ireland and in the euro area, there are signs that inflation is starting to pick-up gradually as the drag on consumer prices from low oil prices has eased. However, consumer prices in Ireland are still relatively low due to previous euro-sterling exchange rate developments, as the UK accounts for a large proportion of imported consumer goods into Ireland.

Looking forward, futures markets for oil are suggesting a further gradual but modest recovery in oil prices over the course of 2017. In addition, the continued growth in domestic demand and the ongoing recovery in the labour market are expected to lead to further services price inflation. Taking all these factors into account, price pressures will likely rise gradually but remain subdued into 2017. In the Stability Programme Update 2017, my Department forecast HICP annual inflation of 0.6 per cent for this year, rising gradually to 1.2 per cent in 2018.

While consumer price inflation is not expected to rise dramatically over the near term, my Department continues to monitor inflation developments very closely. In that regard, this government will continue to implement competitiveness oriented policies which is the best way domestically to counteract any inflationary tendencies and potential loss of competitiveness.

Special Educational Needs Data

104. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children under five years of age attending autism specific preschool or early intervention units funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23590/17]

105. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children aged five, six, seven and eight years of age, respectively, in autism spectrum disorder units and early intervention units in mainstream primary schools and other units funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23591/17]

117. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children aged five, six, seven and eight years of age, respectively, in ASD units and early intervention units in mainstream primary schools and other units funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23723/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104, 105 and 117 together.

The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

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

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

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

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required.

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. Special Classes and Special Schools are staffed with a lower pupil-teacher ratio ranging from 6-1 to 12-1, on the basis of disability categorisation of pupils attending the school.

There are currently 1,152 special classes nationally, which is an increase of over 100% on the number available in 2011. Of these, 126 are ASD early intervention classes, 526 are primary ASD classes and 236 are post-primary ASD classes. The remainder are non-ASD special classes. 125 special schools also provide specialist education for those pupils who need it, from infants to eighteen years of age.

ASD Early intervention classes are available for children over 3 years of age (who will not reach the age of 6 during the school year) with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The NCSE has advised that there are currently 808 pupils attending Early Intervention classes in mainstream or special schools, of which 570 pupils are under 5 years of age.

The following table outlines figures provided by the NCSE detailing the number of pupils of a particular age that are attending ASD classes or special schools.

Age Profile	No. of pupils with ASD in Special Classes and Special Schools
4 yrs and under	727
5 yrs	638
6 yrs	655
7 yrs	667
8 yrs	564

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

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

Third Level Admissions Assistance

106. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will extend the timeframe of a scholarship offer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23617/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the terms and conditions of the Third Level Irish Scholarship Scheme, designed specifically to recognise achievement through Irish, scholarships are awarded annually to students from the Gaeltacht. The awards paid are equivalent to the maximum standard rate of grant payable under the Student Grant Scheme and no means test applies in the case of these scholarships.

The scholarship is awarded for the duration of undergraduate studies and postgraduate studies, provided that the individual progresses to postgraduate within 3 years of graduation. Students who receive this scholarship have considerable flexibility in that they can defer commencement of their postgraduate studies for up to three academic years and still avail of the scholarship award.

The scholarship holder to whom the Deputy refers is currently in her third year of deferral. Unfortunately it is not possible to make exceptions to the terms and conditions of the Third Level Irish Scholarship Scheme, which are equally applicable to all beneficiaries of the scheme.

State Examinations

107. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding leaving certificate students in 1965 and 1966 who had to meet the five subject pass regulation, for example, in the case of a person (details supplied); if a full certificate can be provided in view of the fact there was no option to resit subjects and five subjects were passed over two academic years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23627/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Schools Building Projects Data

108. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding each new school build and school extension in progress across south Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23628/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold the details requested by the geographical area to which she refers.

However, the current status of the 29 school building projects in County Kildare that are

included on the Department's 6 Year Capital Programme is outlined in the following table.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms to schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Responsibility for delivering such projects rests with the individual school authority.

Details of such funding approved in all schools, including Kildare, is available on my Department's website www.education.ie and this is updated regularly.

Capital Programme – Major projects being progressed

County	Roll No	School Name	School type	Status
Kildare	16706G	St Joseph's NS, Kilcock	Primary	Stage 2B
Kildare	70680U	St Conleth's VS, Newbridge	Post-Primary	Under construction
Kildare	70700A	Maynooth Community College	Post-Primary	Stage 3
Kildare	76193Q	New Maynooth Community College	Post-Primary	Stage 3
Kildare	19277A	St Anne's Special School, The Curragh	Special School	Stage 2A
Kildare	19675N	St Brigid's NS, Kilcullen	Primary	Completed
Kildare	76194S	Naas Community College	Post-Primary	Stage 2B
Kildare	76253I	Celbridge Community College	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	20257C	Scoil Naomh Pdraig, Celbridge	Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	15957D	Rathangan BNS	Primary	Substantial completion
Kildare	61702D	St Paul's Post-Primary School	Post-Primary	Stage 2A
Kildare	15040T	Mercy Convent, Naas	Primary	Stage 3
Kildare	18288B	Scoil Mhichil Naofa, Athy	Primary	Stage 2B
Kildare	20428D	Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha, Kildare Town	Primary	Under construction
Kildare	19796C	St Patrick's NS, Clane	Primary	Stage 2B

County	Roll No	School Name	School type	Status
Kildare	15769C16707I	Scoil Eimhinn Naofa & St Peter's NS, Monasterevan	Primary	Stage 2B
Kildare	17341U	Maynooth BNS	Primary	Stage 2B
Kildare	17872F	St Conleth's & St Mary's, Newbridge	Primary	Stage 2A
Kildare	17873H	St Conleth's Infant School	Primary	Stage 2A
Kildare	17254C	St Corban's BNS	Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	18988G	St Raphael's Special School	Special School	Site required
Kildare	19455W	St Mark's Special School, Newbridge	Special School	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	20292E	Maynooth ETNS	Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	61690W	Cross & Passion, Kilcullen	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	70650L	Athy Community College	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	70720G	St Farnan's Post-Primary School	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	13902O	Hewetson NS	Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	61681V	Patrician Post-Primary, Newbridge	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning
Kildare	61730I	St Mary's Girls Post-Primary School, Naas	Post-Primary	Early Architectural Planning

School Accommodation Provision

109. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be moved out of temporary accommodation as was agreed under the divestment programme in view of the fact that it was told that it would only be there for one year and it is now facing into its fourth year at a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23634/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is my Department's intention to relocate the school referred to by the Deputy to their proposed new location as their long-term permanent accommodation. The new proposed building will, however, require significant remediation works and my Department will be in further contact with the Patron on this matter.

In the interim, the school has been advised to extend the lease at its current location to June 2018.

Higher Education Courses Provision

110. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is appropriate funding support available through his Department to run an outreach certificate programme (details supplied). [23650/17]

111. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is appropriate European Union funding available to run an outreach certificate programme (details supplied). [23651/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 and 111 together.

My Department allocates all of the recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including the Universities such as University College Dublin (UCD).

The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution. Universities are autonomous bodies as set out in the Universities Act 1997 and are responsible for their own day to day affairs, including the allocation of all of its income (both public and private).

Schools Refurbishment

112. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if temporary accommodation and toilet facilities will be provided to a school (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the overcrowded rooms and the need for new toilets, which are not being addressed while the school continues to wait for progress on the promised new accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23665/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is in receipt of an application for additional temporary accommodation from the school referred to by the Deputy. The application is currently under consideration and when a decision is made my Department will be in direct contact with the School Authorities.

School Accommodation

113. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school development (details supplied). [23677/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is not in receipt of a recent application from the school referred to in respect of its accommodation needs.

It is open to any school to submit an application to my Department if they have identified a deficit of classroom accommodation to meet increasing enrolments or to accommodate an additional teacher appointment. Application forms can be accessed on my Department’s website

Teacher Redeployment

114. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to extend the redeployment pilot scheme for secondary school teachers to include counties Cork, Clare and Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23694/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The core function of the redeployment arrangements has been to facilitate the redeployment of surplus permanent and CID holding teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to my Department's ability to manage within its payroll budget and ceiling on teacher numbers.

A voluntary redeployment scheme operated on a pilot basis in the Munster region, including counties Cork, Clare and Limerick, in 2015 and 2016. All permanent teachers in Munster were given an opportunity to volunteer for a transfer to other areas if such a transfer would free up a vacancy that would facilitate the redeployment of a surplus permanent teacher in the region.

The arrangement previously operated on a pilot basis in Connaught to facilitate the redeployment of surplus teachers in this region.

In 2017 the pilot voluntary redeployment scheme operates in counties Tipperary, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford. My Department has no plans to extend the redeployment scheme to other counties in 2017.

The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to post-primary schools for the 2017/18 school year, including the redeployment arrangements for the 2017/18 school year, is available on the Department's website education.ie.

Site Acquisitions

115. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider a mixed non-religious school for the site of Harold's Cross greyhound track recently purchased by his Department; if so, the timeframe for development; the general plans for the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23696/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have had preliminary discussions with officials from the relevant local authority regarding the zoning of the site.

With regard to specific school provision for the site referred to by the Deputy, my Department is currently engaged in a review of demographics which will determine the extent of new school provision required nationwide.

Initial projections indicate a requirement for additional places at post-primary level across both the school planning area where the site is situated and the adjoining school planning areas. Projected increases in the primary level population in these areas are also indicated.

Where a requirement for additional schools has been identified, a patronage assessment process will commence to determine who will operate such schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, the patronage assessment process includes the opportunity for parents to express their preference for a particular school model. These parental preferences are key to decisions made regarding patronage of all new schools.

School Staff

116. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will amend his Department's decision to refuse the EAL teacher post appeal for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23717/17]

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

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal for consideration by the Appeals Board for the April 2017 meeting of the board under the EAL criteria. The Appeals Board determined that this appeal was unsuccessful. The school has been notified accordingly. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Minister and the Department and its decision is final.

My Department's Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 set out details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for schools, based on each school's educational profile.

No school, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model.

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

In relation to the school referred to by the Deputy in his question, this school had a General Allocation Model allocation of 40 hours for the 2016/17 school year, which combined with 33.15 resource teaching hours allocated to the school by the National Council for Special Education, gave a total allocation of 73.15 additional teaching hours for the 2016/17 school year.

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

The special education teaching allocation for this school for 2017/18 is 73.15 hours.

There has therefore been no reduction to the special education teaching allocation for this school as a result of the introduction of the new allocation model.

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

Question No. 117 answered with Question No. 104.

Institutes of Technology Funding

118. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are cost cutting plans being considered by Waterford Institute of Technology including redundancies, curtailment of campus opening hours and cuts in course contact hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23745/17]

119. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the nature of the deficit at Waterford Institute of Technology; his plans to reduce the deficit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23746/17]

120. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to shorten the opening hours of the College Street campus of WIT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23747/17]

121. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to cut the number of part-time or temporary lecturers and other staff at WIT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23748/17]

122. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the nature of the interaction between the HEA and WIT in addressing a deficit at the institute; the future role of the HEA in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23749/17]

123. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the chair of the governing body of WIT; if it is occupied or vacant; the length of time it has been vacant or occupied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23750/17]

124. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to close the College Street campus of WIT during the summer months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23751/17]

125. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to close the health science building at WIT for a month or months during the summer period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23752/17]

126. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce redundancies, either voluntary or compulsory, at WIT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23753/17]

127. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the protections in place for staff at WIT under the LRA in the context of redundancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23754/17]

128. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the management of WIT is considering cost cutting proposals at WIT to reduce its current deficit; the nature

of such cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23755/17]

129. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to cut contact hours of courses at WIT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23756/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 to 129, inclusive, together.

My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including Institutes of Technology (IoTs) such as Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

IoTs are autonomous bodies and are responsible for the management of the Institute, including the allocation of all of its income (both public and private) and for the day to day operations of the Institute.

The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular are working closely with those Institutes operating in deficit to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate the deficit as quickly as possible.

The Financial Review of the Institutes, published last year by the HEA, was carried out in order to provide an overview of the financial health of the sector, to consider capacity issues and to examine the challenges for the institutions given their respective plans for the future. The report makes a number of recommendations on how some of the issues which contribute to funding problems in the IoT sector can be addressed and my Department is working with the HEA in relation to those recommendations. This includes the establishment of a Working Group in order to consider the recommendations of the report. The report's recommendations will also feed into the work being currently undertaken by the HEA on developing a sustainable funding model for the sector.

With regard to WIT, they are in year one of a three-year plan, agreed with the HEA, to return the institute to a balanced budget. The plan encompasses a range of activities to address declining student numbers. These include a reinvigorated targeting of the CAO market, focused retention measures and closer enterprise engagement. The HEA are monitoring progress of the three year plan to return WIT to a balanced budget, through quarterly reports, regular meetings and communication with the senior management. In addition, an external financial advisor has been appointed to WIT and he commenced engagement with senior management in February.

In line with normal business practices, I understand that WIT is reviewing its running costs and part of that process involves working through multiple scenarios for optimising resources. Third-level institutions have autonomy in relation to promotion policies and other human resource policies, subject to the requirement to comply with Government policy in respect of employment numbers. Employers in the higher education sector are also required to operate in accordance with the provisions of national industrial relations agreements including the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA). In the event that a union believes that an employer in the higher education sector is not acting in accordance with the terms of the LRA, that union can seek to have the matter addressed using the dispute resolution procedures provided for in the Agreement, and any individuals who have issues of dispute have a variety of dispute resolution options open to them.

The appointment of a new chair of the governing body at WIT is currently underway in my Department with the co-operation of the Public Appointments Service. The current chair

expressed his wish to resign from the position, however, he is continuing in his role until such time as his replacement has been appointed.

Higher Education Courses Provision

130. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the changes to the integrated pharmacy degree training programme; the details of the requirement for student pharmacists to do a four month placement in fourth year and an eight month placement in fifth year without pay; the reasons for this; when the students were informed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23769/17]

131. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason fees for the fifth year pharmacy integrated degree course in the three pharmacy schools are being increased in view of the fact students will spend eight months on placement without pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23770/17]

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the changes to the integrated pharmacy degree training programme requiring student pharmacists to do a four month placement in fourth year and an eight month placement in fifth year without pay; the reason for this; the date students were informed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23847/17]

135. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the fifth year pharmacy integrated degree course in the three pharmacy schools is being increased in view of the fact that students will spend eight months on placement without pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23848/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 130, 131, 134 and 135 together.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) is an independent statutory body and is responsible for defining and ensuring the standards of education and training for pharmacists qualifying in Ireland. This includes developing standards, policies and carrying out accreditation of pharmacy degree programmes.

The changes in the degree programme structure arise from the recommendations of the Pharmacy Education and Accreditation Reviews project and implementation has been overseen by the National Forum for Pharmacy Education and Accreditation.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Education and Training) (Integrated Course) Rules were signed by the Minister for Health in 2014.

These Rules underpin the implementation of the new five-year fully integrated Master's degree programme in pharmacy which evolved from significant review of the previous training pathway, and international best practice assessment in this area. They also gave effect to new accreditation standards that were developed by the PSI and place the Core Competency Framework for Pharmacists on a statutory footing.

The new programme leads to a Master's degree.

Further information in relation to these changes can be requested from the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland.

Departmental Properties

132. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the buildings including each and every publicly funded school, university or education related building and equipment worth in excess of €10,000 that were transferred in whole or in part from his Department or a body under the aegis of his Department to a religious order or body or a voluntary body or other non-State body in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the name of the religious order or body in question; the date of transfer; the value and purpose of the transfer; the consideration paid to the Exchequer in return for the transfer of each of these assets; the buildings including each and every publicly funded school, university or education related building currently under construction which are being funded by his Department or a body under the aegis of his Department; the location it is intended to transfer in whole or in part to a religious order or body or a voluntary body or other non-State body; the projected value of the transfer; the purpose of the transfer; the amount spent to date; and details of equipment that is intended to be transferred. [23813/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has not transferred ownership of any buildings to the various bodies mentioned in the years referred to by the Deputy.

My Department provides funding for school building projects to be constructed on lands owned by religious orders and other non-state bodies (e.g. diocesan trusts) to facilitate existing schools in the context of the school building programme and such buildings are owned by the landowner. Where a school applies for significant capital grant funding to facilitate a building project for a school, such funding is provided on the basis that it will be legally secured.

In relation to equipment, the Department provides funding on a devolved basis to all schools to purchase equipment. Such equipment is owned by the relevant school in question.

With regard to bodies under my aegis, 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 the aegis bodies and will respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Youth Employment Initiative

133. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 11 May 2017, the seven activities originally selected for youth employment initiative, YEI, funding; the individual allocations for these activities over 2014-15; the amount of these funds that has been expended to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23825/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The seven activities originally selected for YEI funding and the individual allocations for these activities over 2014/15 are provided in the following table. As noted in the earlier reply, the YEI activities are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer and the EU Regulations allow for the 2014/15 allocations to be spent and claimed before the end of 2018. No payment application has been made in relation to the YEI or the ESF to date.

The ESF Managing authority maintains an overview of the activities selected for the YEI/ESF and the latest expenditure figures provided by these activities is also provided in the table. However, the Deputy should note that these figures are indicative and are likely to be adjusted

in the context of actual expenditure declarations that will be made following the necessary verification work on claims in accordance with the EU Regulations. In addition, expenditure in 2017 and possibly a portion of 2018, including expenditure on the Community Training Centres which have been approved for the YEI with effect from 2017, will determine the final expenditure declarations included in the YEI claim that is to be submitted to the European Commission before the end of 2018.

Activity	Total Allocation 2014/15€m	Total Spend to 31/12/2016€m
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme	4.648	1.547
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	7.992	3.249
Tús	35.347	16.664
JobBridge	57.24	9.227
Youthreach (South and East Region only for 2014 & 2015)	79.876	157.7
Momentum	13.333	5.411
Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme	6.0	6.830
TOTAL	204.436	200.628

Questions Nos. 134 and 135 answered with Question No. 130.

Special Educational Needs Data

136. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons with a diagnosis of autism who would benefit from attending an ASD unit at primary level and at secondary level by county; the number of ASD units at primary level and secondary level in each county; the number of places available at primary and secondary level in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23893/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The NCSE has informed the Department of Educational and Skills that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

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

The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 162 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year increasing the number of ASD Special Classes by 18% from 888 to 1,050.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in providing ASD special class placements for students where there is an identified need.

School Accommodation Provision

137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a resource room for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23902/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is not in receipt of an application under the Additional School Accommodation scheme, the appropriate scheme in this instance, from the school referred to in respect of its accommodation needs.

It is open to any school to submit an application to my Department if they have identified a deficit of classroom accommodation to meet increasing enrolments or to accommodate an additional teacher appointment. Application forms can be accessed on my Department's website www.education.ie

Planning Issues

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on a document (details supplied) from the Court of Justice of the European Union, regarding the Flemish decree on land and real estate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23589/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the Press Release from the European Court of Justice referred to in the Question and the Judgment to which it relates.

The present position in this matter is set out in the reply to Questions Nos. 128 and 130 of 11 May 2017.

Septic Tank Grants

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will amend legislation to make grant support available to all persons who need to replace their septic tanks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23646/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, brought into operation a grant scheme to assist with the cost of remediation of septic tanks and domestic waste water treatment systems which are deemed, following inspection under the Environmental Protection Agency's National Inspection Plan, to require repair or upgrading. The grant scheme ensures that the limited financial resources available are targeted towards householders, particularly those on lower incomes, who incur expenditure directly as a result of the implementation of the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012.

The Regulations provide that, subject to the applicant meeting all qualification criteria, a local authority may pay a grant to a person who is required, following an inspection, to undertake repairs or upgrades to, or replacement of, a septic tank or other domestic waste water treatment system. Applications for grant aid are administered by the local authorities in whose functional area the particular domestic waste water treatment system requiring remediation is situated. Where a local authority pays a grant under the scheme, my Department will recoup 100% of the amount paid by the local authority. Full details of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, are set out in the explanatory leaflet and application form published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systems/septic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-0>.

It is not proposed to make any changes to the grant scheme at this time.

More generally, householders who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the grant under the aforementioned Regulations and who wish to remediate or upgrade their on-site treatment systems may qualify for relief under the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) Scheme introduced pursuant to Section 5 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. The HRI Scheme covers main residence repairs, renovations and improvements, including the repair or replacement of septic tanks. The Scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and full details are published on the Revenue Commissioner's website at www.revenue.ie.

Local Authority Housing Provision

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to facilitate the building of local authority houses in sufficient numbers to meet the current and emerging situation, in view of the fact that other governments throughout the EU are doing so; the optimum expenditure for such a programme within the confines of fiscal stability regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23856/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To support the implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I have secured €5.35 billion in investment to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. Within the 47,000 social housing units to be delivered it is estimated at this stage that approximately 26,000 will be delivered from construction activity while 11,000 will be acquired by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs) directly from the market or from the Housing Agency, with a portion of these latter units also being newly built. A further 10,000 units will be leased by local authorities and AHBs. The €5.35 billion investment comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. In addition, €200 million is being provided for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund through investment in key enabling infrastructure.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, the needs of over 19,000 households were met in 2016 through a range of housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. Under the Plan, an additional €1.3 billion has been provided for 2017; this funding will support the accelerated delivery of social housing and ensure that the 2017 target to meet the needs of over 21,000 households will be achieved. Within the overall 21,000 target, some 4,500 will be delivered through new builds/acquisitions and a significant proportion of these will involve new construction.

I have published a comprehensive status list of social housing construction schemes that are advancing nationwide, which can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>. This status report, which sets out the position at end 2016, lists the 504 approved social housing construction projects and their locations and contains a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered in 2016 and those progressing through planning, design and construction. These 504 projects, when completed, will deliver circa 8,430 new social houses, some of which were completed in 2016, with the others in the pipeline being completed in 2017 and subsequent years. These projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction/turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by Approved Housing Bodies under the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and AHBs concerned,

in the first instance.

Further project approvals are being added to the pipeline as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs; an updated construction project status report, setting out the position at end Q1 2017, will be published shortly. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Irish Water Data

141. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue collected by Irish Water for commercial rates in 2016, in counties Roscommon, Galway, Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23660/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is not available in my Department. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, including non-domestic billing. Prior to this, non-domestic water charging and billing were matters for the relevant local authority.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Irish Water Data

142. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue collected by Irish Water for new connections in 2016 in counties Roscommon, Galway, Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23661/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is not available in my Department. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Connections to the public water or waste water network are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Planning Issues

143. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to develop official national planning guidelines to regulate for large scale solar developments or solar farms. [23693/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Pro-

posals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments. However, I am keeping the matter under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department - which leads on renewable energy policy - in the context of the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, published in December 2015, the development of a Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework, as well as the finalisation of a new support scheme for renewable electricity by that Department, expected in late 2017.

Local Authority Staff Data

144. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the staffing levels of each local authority compared to 2012. [23698/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is responsible for workforce planning for the local government sector, including monitoring of local government sector employment levels. Staffing numbers for the local authority sector are available on the Public Service Numbers Databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link: <http://databank.per.gov.ie/>. The Databank provides access to information from 1980 onwards.

I understand that March 2017 data will be uploaded to the Databank shortly.

Planning Issues

145. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to change the planning status of large scale peat extraction; and the public consultation he plans to undertake on proposed changes. [23699/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently progressing draft Regulations under the European Com-

munities Act 1972 that will establish a new regulatory regime for large-scale peat extraction. Under the new regime, the Environmental Protection Agency will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of licence applications for existing and new peat extraction of 30 hectares or more and that activity will be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The preparation of the Regulations has been the subject of focused stakeholder input from relevant Government Departments and State bodies, industry representatives and environmental groups last October. A detailed review of the proposals is on-going in light of stakeholder input, with a view to finalising the Regulations by the end of June.

Planning Issues

146. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** 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 the original planning permission expired, most of which would have been before 2012. [23705/17]

147. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** 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, has expired and is awaiting section 28(2) commencement to apply for a second extension; if in the intervening period all construction work should cease until such a time as he decides to commence section 28 and the developer can apply for an extension; if such developers should re-apply for planning permission; and his views on whether this is acceptable. [23706/17]

148. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** 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 the planning permission has expired. [23707/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 to 148, inclusive, together.

The present position in this matter is set out in the reply to Questions Nos. 152, 153, 154, 155, 156 and 157 of 17 May 2017.

Homeless Persons Data

149. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons who presented as homeless and were placed in emergency accommodation on a quarterly basis by county in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23765/17]

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons who presented as homeless and were placed in emergency accommodation per county, on a quarterly basis in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23834/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 152 together.

Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities.

These reports are published on a monthly basis capturing details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities and include a county level breakdown of the homeless adult population. Reports for the entire of 2016 and up to March 2017 are currently available.

Homeless Persons Data

150. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons and households that presented as homeless and were not placed in emergency and-or temporary accommodation due to lack of supply on a quarterly basis by county in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23766/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

The specific data sought in the Question is not available in my Department, and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Local Authority Housing Data

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of houses that were purchased on the open market by local authorities for the provision of social housing by each local authority by county in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23778/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details on the number of properties purchased by all local authorities, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists are 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>. Information on quarter one of 2017 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 149.

Private Rented Accommodation Data

153. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of units of accommodation which are now in full-time use for a company (details supplied) in the greater Dublin area; his views on whether at a time of severe housing crisis he should curb the number of units being used for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23889/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not collate data in relation to accommodation let on a short term basis for tourism purposes.

Article 10(4) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, dealing with change of use exemptions for planning purposes, provides that development consisting of the use of not more than 4 bedrooms in a house, where each bedroom is used for the accommodation of not more than 4 persons as overnight guest accommodation, shall be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provided that such development would not contravene a condition attached to a permission under the Act or be inconsistent with any use specified or included in such a permission.

The interpretation and application of provisions relating to exempted development in any particular case is in the first instance a matter for the local planning authority concerned, or An Bord Pleanála on appeal or referral. Similarly, responsibility for enforcement action in relation to any breach of the planning code is a matter for individual planning authorities, under Part VIII of the 2000 Act. Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including enforcement, with which a planning authority is or may be concerned.

It should be noted that a recent determination by An Bord Pleanála in a particular case has determined that the exclusive use of a residential apartment for short-term holiday lettings is a material change of use requiring planning permission. Therefore, the continued operation of the apartment in question without such planning permission could be considered to be unauthorised development and subject to enforcement proceedings by the relevant local authority under the Planning Act.

In this connection, my Department has, by way of Circular letter PL12/2016 of 22 December 2016, brought this determination to the attention of all planning authorities to ensure that they are aware of:

- the grounds on which the Board reached its decision,
- the planning implications in terms of the requirement for such commercial use of residential units to be the subject of an application for planning permission, and
- the importance of a pro-active approach to planning enforcement generally in this regard.

A copy of the Circular letter is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_12-16_aph_6-16_recent_an_bord_pleanala_decision_on_short_term_lettings.pdf

In the wider context, in December 2016, Government approved the publication of a Strategy

for the Rental Sector. In terms of rental accommodation supply, the focus in the Strategy is on maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply, reflecting the shortages in the supply of rental accommodation in key locations, particularly in urban areas. In some of these areas, there is also significant demand for transitory short-term accommodation. In this context, providing short-term rentals at higher prices may be an attractive option for landlords.

The implications of the above mentioned determination by An Bord Pleanála has raised a number of regulatory and other related issues, such as tax liability, residential tenancy regulation, support for tourism, and planning. The Strategy for the Rental Sector provides for the establishment by my Department of a working group, comprising representatives of relevant stakeholders including local authorities, relevant Departments, public bodies and other interests in the area, with a view to providing more information on the scale and nature of the issue and full clarity regarding the appropriate regulatory approach to be adopted in relation to short-term tourism-related lettings. The working group is due to report in Quarter 2 2017.

Local Authority Housing Data

154. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of social housing units that will be built by local authorities and approved housing bodies and which will be ready for occupation in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23890/17]

155. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of social housing units under construction by local authorities and approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23891/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 155 together.

To support the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I have secured €5.35 billion in investment to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. This €5.35 billion investment comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. In addition, €200 million is being provided for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund through investment in key enabling infrastructure.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, the needs of over 19,000 households were met in 2016 through a range of housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. Under the Plan, an additional €1.3 billion has been provided for 2017, of which some €0.428 billion has been expended to date. This funding will support the accelerated delivery of social housing and the achievement of the 2017 target to meet the needs of over 21,000 households, one element of which involves a target of 2,000 units to be constructed and readied for occupation by local authorities and AHBs.

Details on the number of properties constructed, purchased and leased by all local authorities, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists are 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>

Information on quarter four of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

156. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the scheme of rapid build housing which will be completed next and ready for occupation; when this scheme will be complete; the number of units of accommodation which will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23892/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including rapid build/delivery homes. At the end of 2016, a total of 350 rapid build homes were advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction, with 22 such homes being delivered and occupied in 2016. Over 500 rapid build homes are now advancing and work is underway at advancing a further 500 rapid build homes in 2017, with another 500 units to be delivered in 2018.

In relation to the 350 rapid build homes that were advancing at the end of 2016, the following are the 11 projects concerned:

Projects	Units of accommodation
George's Place, Dun Laoghaire	12 homes
St. Aidan's, Brookfield	71 homes
Poppintree, Ballymun	22 homes (completed)
Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	24 homes
Mourne Road, Drimnagh	30 homes
St. Helena's, Finglas	39 homes
Belcamp, Dublin, 17	38 homes
Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	52 homes
Woodbank, Rathvilly	18 homes
Wellview, Mulhuddart	20 homes
Pinewood, Balbriggan	24 homes

Of these projects, the following are currently on site and are due for completion this year:

Projects left	Units of accommodation	Completion date
St. Helena's, Finglas	39 homes	June
Mourne Road, Drimnagh	30 homes	July
Cherry Orchard	24 homes	July
Belcamp, Dublin 17	38 homes	September
Wellview, Mulhuddart	20 homes	November

It should be noted that Dublin City Council is in negotiation with the contractors in order to accelerate delivery and ensure a phased hand-over of these rapid build homes. The next phase of 70 rapid build homes will commence in Dublin City with the award of contracts in June 2017, with work then commencing on site.

A further 5 schemes, which will deliver 177 units, were approved under the Rapid Delivery Programme in Quarter 1, 2017. They are:

Projects	Units of accommodation
Hansfield, Dublin 15	36 homes

Projects	Units of accomodation
Avondale, Mulhuddart	44 homes
Killininney, Firhouse	24 homes
St. Cuthberts, Clondalkin	59 homes
Glenamuck/Rockville, Dun Laoghaire	14 homes

I expect further projects, particularly in the Greater Dublin Area, to be brought forward shortly.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

157. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Social Protection the length of the contract between An Post and the Department of Social Protection to deliver social welfare payments; and when it will be renegotiated. [23609/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department for Social Protection operates its contract for cash payment services with An Post. The Department signed this contract with An Post in December 2013 and it came into effect in January 2014. The contract ran for an initial two years, expiring at the end of 2015. However the contract can be extended for up to a further four years on an annual basis, i.e. to the end of 2019. The contract has been renewed each year since 2015 and will be considered for renewal again in late 2017.

In line with EU procurement rules the Department will issue a tender for a replacement contract to take effect no later than the end of 2019.

State Pension (Contributory)

158. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of reducing the necessary PRSI contributions to qualify for a State contributory pension from 520 to 260. [23652/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A number of reforms have been made over the years to the State pension (contributory) scheme to provide for sustainable pensions in the future.

“Developing the National Pensions System – Final Report of the National Pensions Board” published in 1993, recommended that the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a contributory pension should be increased to 520, i.e., 10 years contributions. The necessary legislation to effect these recommendations was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 1997 which standardised the paid contribution requirement at 260 from 2002, rising to 520 from April 2012.

In most cases, where older people do not have very high means, those who have less than 520 paid contributions will qualify for an alternative payment instead, such as an Increase for a Qualified Adult (IQA) on their spouses pension, which is paid at up to 90% of the State pension (contributory), or they may qualify for a State pension (non-contributory), which is paid at up to 95% the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory).

At the time this measure was introduced, the annual exchequer net savings were expected to be in the region of €6m per annum but rising substantially on a cumulative basis in the long term. Therefore, the true figure now would be significantly higher.

However, as people with between 260 and 519 paid contributions no longer make claims to State pension (contributory), the data is not available to update this costing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant

159. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of doubling expenditure on the reasonable accommodation fund. [23653/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Reasonable Accommodation Fund assists employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability/impairment to have access to employment by providing a range of grants.

These grants and supports include the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, the Job Interview Interpreter Grant and the Employee Retention Grant.

The purpose of the scheme is to assist unemployed people with disabilities to gain access to the open labour market by providing grants for “reasonable accommodations” in the private sector only and to support private sector employers in the employment of people with disabilities. Based on the average spend since 2012, the estimated full year cost of doubling the expenditure would be just over €180,000.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

160. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the disability allowance by €20. [23654/17]

161. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the State pension by €20, €25, €30 and €35 respectively. [23655/17]

162. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of restoring all working age payments for those under 26 years of age to the full rate of €193. [23656/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 to 162, inclusive, together.

Disability Allowance is a means-tested social assistance payment which is paid to persons aged 16 to 66 who are substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment arising from a medical condition (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria). The estimated cost in 2018 (and a full year) of increasing the weekly personal rate of Disability Allowance by €20, from €193 to €213 per week, is €140.3 million. Each €1 increase in the weekly personal rate would cost €7.03 million in 2018 and a full year.

There is an analogous social insurance payment, Invalidity Pension, which is paid to persons who are permanently incapable of work (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria and a minimum number - 5 years - of paid Class A PRSI contributions). Each €1 increase in the weekly rate of Invalidity Pension would cost €3.2 million in 2018 and a full year.

In addition, Blind pension is available for those aged 18 to 66 who are blind or visually impaired. The cost of a €1 weekly personal increase in the Blind Pension is €0.07 million in 2018 and a full year.

The state pension costings sought by the Deputy are detailed in the following table:

Table 1: Cost of increasing all payments for those aged 66 and over by varying amounts

Scheme	Full year cost of a €20 increase €m	Full year cost of a €25 increase €m	Full year cost of a €30 increase €m	Full year cost of a €35 increase €m
State Pension Contributory	392.4	490.5	588.6	686.7
Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Con) Pension – aged 66 and over	88.4	110.5	132.6	154.7
Deserted Wife's Benefit – aged 66 and over	2.4	3	3.6	4.2
Death Benefit Pension – aged 66 and over	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7
State Pension Non Contributory	101.2	126.5	151.8	177.1
Carer's Allowance – aged 66 and over	2.0	2.5	3	3.5
Half Rate Carer's Allowance – aged 66 and over	5.2	6.5	7.8	9.1
OVERALL TOTAL	592.0	740.0	888.0	1,036.0

The cost of increasing the reduced weekly rates of €102.70 and €147.80, which are payable to recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance who are under 26 years of age, to the maximum rate of €193 per week is estimated at €117.8 million in a full year.

These costs include the cost of proportionate increases for qualified adults, and those on reduced rates of payment, where applicable. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Household Benefits Scheme

163. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reinstate the telephone allowance as part of the household benefit package;; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [23675/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on these elements of the household benefits package for over 426,000 customers. The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen significantly each year, as the number of eligible customers grew. At the end of September 2013 there were almost 396,000 receiving the telephone allowance compared to approximately 316,000 people in 2007. This was an increase of 25%, or an average increase of approx. 4% per annum.

The Government is keenly aware of the impact of Budget decisions on the Department's clients, and strives to ensure that the money available is targeted in the most effective way. In Budget 2016, the first increase in the basic rate of the State pension in seven years was given. This increased the personal rate of the non-contributory pension to €222, and that of the contributory pension to €233.30. There was also a €2.50 increase in the rate of the Fuel Allowance, from €20 to €22.50 per week.

In Budget 2017, I announced a further increase in the rate of State pensions by €5, bringing the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory) to €238.30.

Therefore, over the past two Budgets, the maximum weekly rate for State Pensions has increased by €8 per week, which is the equivalent of over €34 per month. The value of these increases is significantly in excess of the value of the telephone allowance previously provided.

Any decision to restore the telephone allowance would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

164. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will have their farm assist appeal decision issued; his views on whether the appeal is taking an excessive amount of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23691/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The appeal of the person concerned was registered with the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 16 November 2016. I am advised that it is likely that his appeal will be determined within the next week or so.

The quasi-judicial nature of the appeal system impacts on appeal processing times which are proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal and often require a high level of judgement, in addition to the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times are closely monitored and every effort continues to be made to ensure that appeals are processed as promptly and efficiently as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

165. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider amending the regulations for persons applying for the State contributory pension; his views on whether examining a situation in which persons had contributions up to 47 to 48 years during that period but had no contributions resulting in their pensions being reduced, notwithstanding the fact that they could have easily had over 1,500 reasonable contributions during their lifetime is equitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23715/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension (contributory), all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

At the moment, to qualify for the State pension (contributory) a person must have at least 520 paid contributions and satisfy a yearly average test (a yearly average of 48 contributions paid and/or credited is required for a maximum rate pension). The yearly average test has been in existence since 1961 when contributory pensions were first introduced. The scheme was designed with a view to ensuring that people could qualify for contributory pensions immediately and to suit a system where social insurance coverage was limited.

Entitlement is banded, with the maximum rate payable to those with a yearly average of 48-52 contributions, and the minimum rate payable to those with a yearly average in the range of 10-14 contributions per year. Even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they would generally qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their contribution record. As is generally the case with contributory pension systems, people with greater numbers of contributions tend to qualify for higher rates of payments, depending on their circumstances.

If a person started work at age 18, reaching pension age 48 years later at age 66 and had 1,500 contributions paid or credited (i.e. just under 29 years contributions over a period of 48 years), this would equate to a yearly average of approximately 31 contributions, and attracts a 90% pension. Had the same person a greater number of contributions in the same period, they might qualify for a higher rate of payment. Similarly, if they had fewer contributions over the same period, they might qualify for a lower rate of payment.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a State pension (non-contributory), which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. While this payment is subject to a household means-test, there are very significant disregards which mean that over 70% of such pensioners qualify at the full rate.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation.

Following completion of the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund later this year, my Department will conduct a consultation of relevant stakeholders. Thereafter, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval of the new approach.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

166. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Social Protection when self-employed persons can claim invalidity pensions as announced in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23811/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In line with the commitment contained in the Programme for Government for an improved PRSI scheme for the self-employed, I announced, as part of Budget 2017, the extension of cover for Invalidity Pension to the self-employed on the same basis as employees. This measure will have effect from December 2017.

This is a major reform as, for the first time, self-employed people will have access to the safety net of State income supports, without having to go through a means test, if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability.

Furthermore, since March 2017, self-employed people now have access to the treatment benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental examinations, and contributions towards the cost of hearing aids.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Authentication

167. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the specific documentary evidence deemed acceptable in circumstances in which a British citizen does not have a driving licence or passport as identification for the purposes of securing a public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23823/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In circumstances where a British citizen applying for a Public Services Card does not have acceptable photographic ID, such as a driving licence or a passport, they are interviewed by a supervisor and asked to provide information in relation to their employment, social welfare and address history. Where the person has been living in the State, the answers can then be checked against the information held on the Department's systems. Where the person has recently come to the State, the answers given are recorded and checked with the British authorities.

Any other evidence of identity which the person has should be provided as, while it may not be acceptable in its own right, it may serve to support the verification of identity in conjunction with other documents and information collected during the interview process.

I hope that clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Job Initiatives

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for a scheme to replace jobsbridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23833/17]

(Deputy Leo Varadkar): JobBridge was introduced in July 2011 in response to the sharp

and dramatic increase in unemployment. A robust external evaluation of the scheme conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2016 found that it is one of the most effective labour market programmes – increasing participants' employment outcomes by 32%. It also found that while participants rated the scheme positively on 18 out of 20 aspects measured, most were dissatisfied with the level of payment and a sizable minority rated the scheme negatively on some aspects, for example the quality of training offered. Based on the findings, and taking account of the improvement in labour market conditions, Indecon recommended that JobBridge be discontinued in its current form and replaced with a new scheme. A copy of the full evaluation can be found at: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobBridge-Evaluation.aspx> .

The Labour Market Council welcomed the report and noted the positive employment impact of the scheme. A majority of the Council similarly recommended that JobBridge be replaced.

Having considered the evidence and the suggestions put forward by Indecon and the Labour Market Council, I announced the closure of JobBridge to new applications from 27th October 2016 and my intention to replace it later this year with a new work experience programme better suited to the much-improved labour market and that addresses criticisms of the scheme.

I am very conscious that any new scheme would need the support, trust and confidence of employers, jobseekers and the public. That is why I instructed my officials to consult with key stakeholders before making a final decision on any potential replacement scheme. That process has recently concluded and I will make an announcement after I have a chance to consider the feedback.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an exceptional needs payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23858/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned has not lodged an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment. The Designated Person in the Intreo Office concerned has forwarded an application to them today to complete and return. On receipt of same, their claim will be processed and a decision made on their application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision regarding eligibility for a disability allowance, carer's allowance and domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied) will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23860/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 21 April 2017. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

According to our records, we have not received a carers allowance claim or a domiciliary care allowance claim to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23861/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): According to the records of this Department the person concerned made an initial claim on 24/4/2017 on the basis that she had a difficulty budgeting for school expenses and examination fees. Details were later provided of arrangements made to fund the cost of travel for her mother's funeral. On this basis an Exceptional Needs Payment was made to the person concerned on 8/5/2017.

It is open to the person concerned to make an application to have this decision reviewed by submitting a request to the SWA Review Officer, Department of Social Protection, Government Buildings, The Murrough, Co. Wicklow.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review an application for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23865/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that there is no record of any appeal by the person concerned having been received in that office. In light of your request, an appeal will be registered and in accordance with statutory requirements the Appeals Office will contact the person concerned to ask her to set out her complete grounds of appeal i.e. the reason why she disagrees with the conclusions of the Deciding Officer. On receipt of her response the relevant Department papers will be requested from the Carer's Allowance Section. When these are received the appeal will be assigned to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

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.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Appeals

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23881/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Of-

18 May 2017

office has advised me that a Supplementary Welfare Allowance (Rent Supplement) appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 11 May 2017. The Appeals Officer will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

I am further advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that a Jobseeker's Allowance appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13 March 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. According to information available from the Department, the case in question has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector for further investigations. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

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.

Departmental Reports

174. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when his department will publish its report into bogus self employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23901/17]

(Deputy Leo Varadkar): An interdepartmental working group, comprising officials from the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners, has been examining the issue of disguised employment.

To inform the work of the group, a public consultation on the use of intermediary-type employment structures and self-employment arrangements and their impact on income tax and PRSI, was undertaken in 2016. This includes situations where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide his or her services to an employer but who, though classified as self-employed, is dependent on, and under the control of, a single employer.

The consultation received 23 submissions from interested parties, including employers, trade unions, professional bodies and individuals. The working group is preparing a report which will present the views of these organisations and individuals, together with an analysis of the issues arising. I understand that the working group is currently finalising the report.

I look forward to seeing the report and I will then consider, along with my colleague the Minister for Finance, what steps may be required to address any issues arising.

Family Income Supplement Data

175. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of Defence Forces personnel who received family income supplement in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23903/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support, which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings

with children. FIS is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are nearly 57,000 families with almost 127,000 children in receipt of FIS. The estimated spend on FIS this year is approximately €422 million.

To qualify for FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment, which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount, which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

According to FIS data as of week ending Fri 6 May 2017 there are currently 194 customers in receipt of FIS recorded under the occupational code covering members of the defence forces.

The figures for families in receipt of FIS for previous years as requested by the Deputy are as follows:

- 2013 - 240
- 2014 - 241
- 2015 - 243
- 2016 - 216

For the purposes of consistency it is important to note that the figures above are based on the amount of families in receipt of FIS at week 52 of the relevant year, as such the figures may go up or down depending on the week in the year.

Family Income Supplement Data

176. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of family income supplement in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [23904/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following table.

Number of recipients of Family Income Supplement at 31 December in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017

Year	Recipients
2013	44,159
2014	50,306
2015	55,913
2016	57,567
30th April 2017	56,833

Land Acquisition

177. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the land acquired by the State in Lucan Demesne and St. Catherine's Park has been retained

by the OPW or has been transferred in part or all to Fingal, South Dublin and Kildare County Councils; if a plan was provided by all three local authorities to the OPW; if so, when; if there are restrictions as to developments that may be permitted in the park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23692/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Management of the lands referred to, which were acquired by the Commissioners of Public Works in 2006, was passed, by agreement, to the Local Authorities, also referred to in the question. The Commissioners have not been appraised of definitive development plans for the lands.

Public Sector Pensions

178. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department will hold formal negotiations with a group (details supplied) regarding the restoration of cuts to pensions in view of the fact that they affect retired public servants. [23689/17]

182. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if retired public servants will be represented at the forthcoming public sector pay talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23897/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 182 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 186 on 17 May 2017.

Flood Prevention Measures

179. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the flood prevention measures put in place along the River Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23727/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is delivering a multi-annual programme of capital investment in flood defence measures, from the €430 million allocated through the Capital Investment Plan 2016 to 2021. Since 2009, a number of major flood defence schemes have been completed in the Shannon catchment area including Ennis Upper and Derrymullen, Ballinasloe. Further schemes are currently underway at Kings Island in Limerick, Foynes, Athlone, Ennis Lower and Ennis South.

The OPW introduced the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme in 2009, following the flood events experienced in many parts of the country. The purpose of the scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The scheme generally applies where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame. Details of the administrative arrangements for this scheme are available on the OPW website, www.opw.ie.

Table 1 sets out the annual detail by Local Authority area of the 473 minor works projects approved by the OPW each year since 2009 within the Shannon Catchment area. The OPW also publishes on its website, www.opw.ie, the location and details of each project approved. The commencement and progression of any works, for which funding is approved, is a matter for

each Local Authority concerned.

The core strategy for addressing the significant flood risks along the River Shannon is the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. Of the 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) nationwide, there are 66 in the Shannon River Basin District that have been assessed within the Shannon CFRAM study. These are listed in Table 2 attached.

Feasible flood relief structural measures have been identified to provide protection to almost all properties at assessed significant risk from flooding. Following a public consultation process, the Flood Risk Management Plans are now being finalised, taking on board the observations received. These final Plans will include a prioritised list of feasible structural measures, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner.

In January 2016, the Government took decisive action to support the existing plans in place to address flooding on the Shannon and established the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group to enhance ongoing co-operation of all State agencies involved with the River Shannon and to add value to the CFRAM Programme.

The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group has taken the decision to develop a plan for strategic maintenance works on the River Shannon that will complement the Group's Work Programme and the specific measures that are identified for the areas at risk in the CFRAM Draft Shannon Flood Risk Management Plan. The Group has established a sub-committee to address all of the necessary legal, environmental, technical and other considerations that arise in bringing forward both short term and long term proposals. The Group has now agreed to the delivery of targeted maintenance activities to be carried out in a range of locations this year in accordance with the permitted seasonal windows for such activities.

Since last October, the Group has also been piloting the lowering of the lake levels in Lough Allen to help mitigate potential flood risk during Winter months and has also endorsed the commencement of a specific project, led by the OPW, to identify viable flood risk reduction measures in the Shannon Callows.

Table 1

Approved Projects under Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme in the Shannon Catchment

2009 to 2017 (to end April)

Local Authority	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	End-April 2017	Approved Projects 2009-2017
										Total
Cavan County Council	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Clare County Council	1	6	4	5	0	0	6	1	0	23

Local Authority										Ap- proved Projects 2009- 2017
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	End- April 2017	Total
Cork County Council	2	9	5	5	1	0	1	2	0	25
Donegal County Council	0	10	2	2	6	5	0	0	0	25
Galway County Council	1	66	18	24	7	7	19	14	9	165
Kerry County Council	8	2	4	4	1	1	5	2	0	27
Laois County Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leitrim County Council	0	4	2	5	3	3	0	2	0	19
Limerick City & County Council	0	17	2	0	2	1	2	3	0	27
Longford County Council	0	3	5	0	0	0	1	5	2	16
Mayo County Council	8	5	4	1	0	2	1	6	1	28
Meath Council County	1	1	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	9
Offaly County Council	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Roscommon County Council	5	14	6	2	1	1	0	10	4	43
Sligo County Council	1	1	1	1			1	0	0	5
Tipperary County Council	2	15	5	7	0	1	4	7	4	45
Westmeath County Council	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority										Approved Projects 2009-2017
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	End-April 2017	Total
Totals	32	162	59	61	21	21	41	56	20	473

Further details on all projects approved under the Scheme can be found on the OPW website:

<http://www.opw.ie/en/flood-risk-management/operations/minorfloodworkscostalprotectionscheme/>

Table 2

Areas of Further Assessment (AFAs) in the Shannon CFRAM Study

County	-	-	-	-
Co Kerry	Tralee	Banna	Moneycashen	Tarbert Power Station
	Listowel	Abbeydorney	Ballylongford	
Co Cork	Charleville	Milford		
Co Limerick	Athea	Limerick City	Castleconnell	Dromcolliher
	Adare	Clarina	Croom	Kilmallock
	Rathkeale	Askeaton	Newcastle West	Cappamore
	Abbeyfeale	Foynes		
Co Clare	Kilkee	Kilrush	Springfield	Killaloe/Ballina
	Quin	Bunratty	Sixmilebridge	Shannon
	Ennis	Shannon Airport (IRR3)	O'Briens Bridge	
Co Tipperary	Roscrea	Borrisokane	Nenagh	Newport
Co Galway	Portumna	Ahascragh	Ballinalsoe	
Co Offaly	Clara	Pollagh	Rahan	Birr
	Shannon Harbour	Shannon BridgePower Station(IRR2)		
Co Laois	Clonaslee			
Co Longford	Longford	Clondara	Edgeworthstown	Abbeyshrule
	Lanesborough Power Station (IRR1)	Ballymahon		
Co Roscommon	Boyle	Roscommon	Castlerea	Athleague
Co Westmeath	Athlone	Mullingar	Kilbeggan	
Co Leitrim	Drumshanbo	Leitrim	Mohill	Dromod
	Carrick-on-Shannon			

Public Sector Pensions

180. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consult with a group (details supplied) regarding the restoration of public sector pensions with particular reference to moving forward the 2021 timeline in the programme for Government. [23763/17]

181. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will engage in a formal talks process with a group (details supplied) to discuss the way in which the date projected in the programme for Government for completion of the restoration of pensions 2021 could be brought forward. [23764/17]

183. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consult a group (details supplied) regarding the restoration of public sector pensions with a view to moving forward the 2021 timeline in the programme for government. [23925/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180, 181 and 183 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.

Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 178.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 180.

Banking Sector

184. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the community bank consultation that her Department is undertaking. [23610/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The *Programme for a Partnership Government* envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be

asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, which could be delivered through the post office network. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

My Department is actively working with the Department of Finance to progress the *Programme for a Partnership Government* commitments. A public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks to 29 March. My Department received a total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders and all submissions are now available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/consultation/consultation-on-local-community-banking/>

Senior officials from my Department and the Department of Finance also met with representatives of the German Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland to discuss the viability of the Sparkassen model of local community banking in an Irish context.

All views received in relation to this matter are being considered and I anticipate that work on the examination of community banking models will be completed shortly. A report will be submitted to Government at that stage.

Firearms Licences

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding night-time shootings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23657/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While I have no proposals to amend the Wildlife Acts, it is my understanding that a report has been produced by a working group set up by the Firearms Consultative Panel of the Department of Justice and Equality which recommends best practice guidelines on the issue of shooting and hunting at night. The report is now with the Firearms Consultative Panel itself and it is a matter for that body to further consider the recommendations in the report. An official of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is a member of the Firearms Consultative Panel.

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

Disease Awareness

186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Lyme disease. [23639/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The presence of ticks, which are the main vector for the transmission of Lyme Disease and similar infections, is an issue throughout the countryside and is not confined to National Parks, Nature Reserves or designated lands. These ticks can be found on a variety of animals including mice, voles, hedgehogs, dogs, sheep, deer and horses. The National Parks and Wildlife Service websites and notice/info boards provide useful information

18 May 2017

and advice for members of the public intending to visit National Parks and Nature Reserves. Information on Lyme Disease is available from the HSE at

<http://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/Vectorborne/LymeDisease/>.

Greenways Development

187. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if progress on the provision of a pedestrian and cyclist route along the railway across the Broadmeadow estuary is being delayed due to a lack of resources in the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS; and the NPWS's response to the draft proposal and natural impact assessment. [23697/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The progression of any proposals in relation to the development of such a pedestrian and cycle route is a matter for consideration, in the first instance, by Irish Rail and Fingal County Council.

Thatching Grants Expenditure

188. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding funding to grant aid or other supports for reroofing unique thatch cottages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23828/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Financial support is provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings, including the Built Heritage Investment Scheme, the Structures at Risk Fund and other initiatives operated by the Heritage Council. The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures (i.e. structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures). I recently announced over five hundred projects across the country that will be supported by the scheme in 2017 which will create employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. Structures must be on the local authority Record of Protected Structures. The fund, administered through the local authorities, seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. I recently announced 67 projects countrywide that will be supported under the Structures at Risk Fund for 2017.

While the closing dates for both of the above schemes have now passed, my Department will work closely with the local authorities throughout the year in order to ensure that the best possible use is made of all funds within the schemes, including by reallocating funds where necessary when projects do not proceed within agreed timeframes.

The circulars setting out the terms and conditions of the schemes are available on all local authority websites, and on my Department's website. Any enquiries should be directed to the relevant local authority.

In the context of a particular building, especially one which is on the Record of Protected

Structures, the best advice for the owner may be to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer of the local authority who will be able to advise on the various types of funding available to assist with the building.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. Grant schemes for 2017 are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website www.heritage-council.ie.

My Department does not administer a funding scheme specifically for thatched structures. However, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government administers a grant scheme for the renewal or repair of thatched roofs of owner occupied houses. Full details are available from their website or by contacting the Thatching Grants Section of that Department.

Psychological Services

189. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a psychologist has been appointed to an organisation (details supplied) for children requiring such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23629/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the drug Respreeza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23630/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding asthma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23632/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government is directly relevant to the deputy's question. It includes a commitment to significantly reduce the cost of medicines for all citizens. The reduction in the prescription charge for over 70's in Budget 2017 was an important measure in this regard. I will continue to examine other measures to deliver on this important commitment in future years, having regard to the funding available to facilitate such measures.

The introduction of GP care without fees to children under 6 years of age also represents a

major step forward in improving access, quality and affordability of health care in Ireland. The under-6s GP service contract, which includes age-based preventive checks focused on health and well-being and a cycle of care for children with asthma, underlines the Government's commitment to enhancing primary care and keeping people well in their own community. Almost 364,000 children under 6 have access to GP care without fees through a medical card or GP visit card and over 31,200 children have been registered for the asthma cycle of care by their GPs as at 9th May 2017.

On the issue of dealing with the threat from tobacco, Tobacco Free Ireland – the report of the Tobacco Policy Review Group – was endorsed by Government and published in October 2013. It builds on existing tobacco control policies and legislation already in place in this country, and sets a target for Ireland to be tobacco free (i.e. with a smoking prevalence rate of less than 5%) by 2025. The Government is committed to implementing Tobacco Free Ireland as outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government. Some of the key achievements since the publication of Tobacco Free Ireland are:

- the increase in price of tobacco products in Budgets 2014, 2015 and 2016;
- the commencement of legislation which protects children from second hand smoke in cars;
- the commencement of legislation to provide for standardised packaging of tobacco products;
- the commencement of legislation to transpose the EU Tobacco Products Directive;
- the commissioning and publication of the economic cost of smoking in Ireland report;
- the publication of the Health Information and Quality Authority's Health Technology Assessment of smoking cessation interventions;
- the further development by the HSE of the QUIT campaign and the enhancement of supports for smokers who wish to stop smoking;
- the commencement of a process to develop National Clinical Guidelines for smoking cessation between the HSE, the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) and other stakeholders;
- the publication of research on tobacco including the potential impacts of standardised packaging;
- the continued enforcement of tobacco control legislation by the HSE;
- the continuation of an annual Healthy Ireland Survey, the Health Behaviour in School Children Study (HBSC) and the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) which gives up-to-date reliable data on the prevalence of smoking throughout the whole population;
- the engagement in the Healthy Ireland Framework to assist with changing social norms around smoking;
- the involvement of the NGO sector in supporting Tobacco Free Ireland actions;
- the approval of Government to proceed with drafting the General Scheme of a Bill to provide for the introduction of a licensing system and other measure for tobacco products and non-medicinal nicotine delivery systems, including electronic cigarettes; and

- the engagement with the World Health Organisation in implementing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

These actions together with other past initiatives have resulted in a decrease in the prevalence of smoking in Ireland.

Finally, the HSE has a National Clinical Programme for Asthma (NCPA). It is responsible for designing and specifying standardised models of care, guidelines, pathways and associated strategies for the delivery of integrated clinical care to improve quality, access and value. The overarching aim of the NCPA is to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with asthma in Ireland and to improve clinical outcomes and the quality of life of all patients with asthma.

Disease Awareness

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to increase awareness of Lyme disease in view of recent protests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23638/17]

213. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 502 of 9 May 2017, the terms of reference for the survey and the person or body that was consulted; if all best practice testing mechanisms currently available were included in this survey, including methods that look for cellular activity; if the economic cost of not using adequate laboratory methods was considered; when the results will be made public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23713/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 213 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/>.

Since 2013, the HPSC has held an annual ‘Lyme Awareness Week’ at the beginning of the tick biting season, the purpose of which is to draw attention - particularly in the media - to Lyme disease and the ticks that can spread this disease. This year Lyme Disease week started last Monday and will continue until 22 May, with a further media and other activities due to take place over the rest of the week. It is normally held at this time of the year to raise awareness before people engage in outdoor activities such as ramblers, campers, mountain bikers, and others who work and walk in forested or grassy, which bring them into contact with ticks. Advice is given on how to avoid tick bites, and on what to do if you are bitten. Further information is available on the HPSC website - www.hpsc.ie - and on twitter

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 an 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 also 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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

193. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for a spinal consultation at Tallaght hospital; the number awaiting triage to go on the waiting list; and the steps he will take to reduce the list. [23644/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Licensing

194. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently holding licences granted by his Department for the cultivation of hemp here in accordance with Commission Regulation (EEC) No. 1164/89. [23649/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As of 16 May 2017 seven licences have been issued for the cultivation of hemp.

Medical Card Appeals

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23658/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

196. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an orthopaedic appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23659/17]

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

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

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

Home Care Packages Provision

197. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a case (details supplied) regarding home care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23662/17]

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.

Accident and Emergency Departments Data

198. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have presented at Mayo University Hospital emergency department from 1 January 2017 to 30 April 2017; and if the numbers presenting are over the capacity of the emergency department. [23666/17]

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

Hospitals Funding

199. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the capital funds which will be allocated to Belmullet community hospital for rebuilding and refurbishment; and his plans to extend or reduce services at the hospital. [23667/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

200. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding rheumatology services at Mayo University Hospital; the number of days and hours per week a consultant is on site seeing patients; the number of rheumatology patients who have been seen by a rheumatology consultant at Mayo University Hospital to date in 2017; his plans to extend the service; and if so when. [23668/17]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

201. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans to employ a rheumatology clinical nurse specialist at Mayo University Hospital; and if not, the reason therefore. [23669/17]

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

Patient Transfers

202. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of rheumatology patients from County Mayo who have been referred for services in counties Galway, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23670/17]

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

Mental Health Services Data

203. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the HSE funding allocated to each of the 11 Jigsaw projects across the State in each of the years 2012 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and his plans to increase funding for jigsaw projects. [23672/17]

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

Health Screening Programmes

204. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if sufficient funding will be maintained by his Department to ensure that the bowel screen service remains in place. [23676/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): BowelScreen, the National Bowel Screen-

ing Programme, is run by the HSE's National Screening Service. The BowelScreen programme is adequately funded and strenuous efforts are being made to improve the uptake rate of this free service, particularly among men who have lower rates of participation but significantly higher rates of cancer detection compared to women.

The BowelScreen programme has led to the early diagnosis of cancers and better outcomes for patients. The introduction of BowelScreen, is in line with best international practice in regard to the early detection and effective treatment of colorectal cancer.

The BowelScreen Round One Programme Report (2012-2015) shows that 521 cancers were detected through bowel screening, 3 out of 4 of which were detected at an early stage of cancer development.

Ambulance Service Staff

205. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if there is a policy prohibiting first response paramedics deployed from Northern Ireland from providing treatment according to their qualified skillset, such as suturing, to persons when dispatched to attend to calls here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23680/17]

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

Addiction Treatment Services

206. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to tackle gambling addiction; the amount of funding which has been provided by the HSE to gambling addiction support services in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and his plans to increase funding for these services. [23683/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): People who present to the HSE for addiction treatment for gambling are offered the same range of interventions as those who present with a drug and alcohol addiction, or a mental health concern, including an initial assessment, a comprehensive assessment, and individual counselling. Counselling and rehabilitation services provide care to those presenting with a gambling addiction through one to one counselling, financial advice and onward referral to other services and supports where appropriate, such as Gamblers Anonymous.

The HSE provides funding to a number of voluntary sector providers who, in addition to treating drug and alcohol addictions, also treat gambling addiction. However, it is not possible to identify the amount of funding which has been provided by the HSE specifically for the treatment of gambling addiction. According to the National Drug Treatment Reporting System, 208 cases were treated for gambling in Ireland in 2015, the latest year for which data is available.

I am informed by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality that it remains her intention to proceed with gambling legislation at the earliest opportunity. The preparation of a Gambling Control Bill continues on that basis. However, it should be acknowledged that it will require some significant updating to take account of developments since 2013. The preparation of legislation will be a major and complex undertaking.

Hospital Services

207. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health his views on the comment from the representative of Cork university hospital in correspondence (details supplied) justifying a three day delay to the treatment of a person's head wound; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23690/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is responsible for providing public health care in hospitals and communities throughout the country. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

208. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans for winter 2017 and 2018; his further plans to incorporate private hospitals to the winter task force in order that all possible facilities are used to facilitate patient care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23701/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In September 2016 the HSE launched its 'Winter Initiative Plan 2016-2017' which provided €40 million of additional funding for winter preparedness. This Initiative took a broad approach to managing Winter pressures in an integrated way across Acute Hospitals, Primary Care and in the community. Practical measures implemented included 90 additional beds, aids and appliances for over 4,450 patients, around 1,000 extra home care packages and 615 additional transitional care bed approvals.

Within this context the Winter Initiative also aimed to utilise as appropriate, all services at its disposal both public and private, to alleviate pressure in EDs. For example this Winter it funded a collaboration between the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital and the Mater Private Hospital and under the enhanced measures put in place in January 2017, access to additional diagnostic services such as Ultra-sound and X-ray were made available to GPs, through existing private providers.

The Winter Initiative concluded in March 2017 and both the Department and HSE have undertaken a Lessons Learned process to collate the key learning from this Initiative in order to inform planning for Winter 2017 and 2018. In addition the Department is working with the HSE to develop a roadmap towards improving the patient experience and reducing the number of patients waiting for admission on trolleys nationally. This important work will provide a framework for the planning, development and monitoring of measures aimed at alleviating pressure on EDs and in particular Winter preparedness moving forward.

During 2017 the HSE will also continue to work with the NTPF and the Department to ensure the best use of public hospital capacity and the private hospital system to meet the needs of patients.

Hospital Procedures

209. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the cost for procedures (details supplied) in each public hospital. [23702/17]

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

Health Insurance Prices

210. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his views on an organisation's (details supplied) statement that the public hospital charges for private patients is adding in a significant way to health insurance premium costs; the amount per annum which has been collected by the charge since its introduction; the amount collected to date in 2017; if his Department has carried out an assessment of the link between these charges and premium increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23703/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that some organisations have attributed recent rises in health insurance premiums to increasing claims cost, arising primarily from the introduction of the Health (Amendment) Act 2013. However, it is important to clarify that the cost of private health insurance is influenced by a number of factors, for example the number of persons in the market, the age profile of those holding private health insurance and ongoing medical innovations. Each of these are contributors to the cost of care, the cost of claims and therefore the cost of premiums payable.

It is also important to re-state the policy rationale for the introduction of the Health (Amendment) Act 2013. Although a proportion of activity in public hospitals involves the provision of care to private patients, the core purpose of the system is to provide services for public patients. Government policy is to ensure that there is equitable access for public patients, that the proportion of private activity is appropriately controlled and that the costs of provision of services to private patients are appropriately recouped by public hospitals. All patients who opt to be treated privately in a public hospital are subject to charges, as provided for by the Health (Amendment) Act 2013. This Act addressed a situation identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his 2008 report whereby when a private inpatient was accommodated in a public or non-designated bed, no private inpatient charge applied. The additional income generated as a result of the enactment of the 2013 legislation is a key element of the funding to the public hospital system and any curtailment of this funding stream would put further pressure on the Exchequer and the taxpayer in order to maintain service levels.

While my Department has not carried out a specific assessment of the link between these charges and premium increases, it is conducting an analysis of trends in private activity in public hospitals since the Health (Amendment) Act 2013 commenced. It is expected that this report will be completed before the end of May. In relation to the particular queries raised regarding charges collected, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Health Insurance Levy

211. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if the State takes a profit from the Revenue Commissioners' collection of health insurance levies from health insurance companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23704/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Risk equalisation is a mechanism designed to support the objective of a community-rated health insurance market, whereby all customers pay the same net premium (adjusted to reflect any loadings applicable under lifetime community rating) for the same health insurance product, irrespective of age, gender or health status. Under the risk equalisation scheme, credits are paid to insurers for their older and sicker members. These credits are funded directly by stamp duty levies on all health insurance contracts written. The scheme redistributes funds between insurers to meet some of the additional costs

of insuring older and sicker members. The scheme is self-funding and exchequer neutral, neither a cost nor a benefit to the State.

The legislative basis for the levy is provided for in the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999. The levy is collected by the Revenue Commissioners from insurers and all of the monies collected are paid over to the Risk Equalisation Fund administered by the independent regulator - the Health Insurance Authority. The Authority redistributes the monies back to the health insurance companies by way of credits in respect of older and sicker people. The scheme therefore protects community-rating by spreading the cost of insuring older and sicker people across the market and allows all people to continue to pay the same net amount for a given health insurance product.

Disease Management

212. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if will consider the establishment of a myalgic encephalomyelitis working group with immediate effect, as suggested by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23712/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With respect to the question raised by the deputy, the HSE has advised my department that to date there is no known specific laboratory diagnostic test to determine or confirm a correct diagnosis of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.); nor is there any one specific treatment that works for all sufferers. Assessment and interventions need to be tailored by the clinician to the individual.

As with all assessments and treatments, whether they are provided in a primary care or secondary care setting, the HSE aims to provide comprehensive, evidence-based, safe, up-to-date care for all our patients. The HSE is mindful of the impact on adults, children and their families of the diagnosis of many of the serious conditions encountered. Ultimately, it aims to support patients and their families through the range of available treatments.

While there are a number of international diagnostic systems for clinicians, the HSE has advised that the Irish ME Trust, an Irish patient representative organisation, supports the use of the Canadian Consensus Guideline for the diagnosis and treatment of M.E. The diagnosis of M.E. in this document outlines that a person should have a number of symptoms in the following areas:

- Fatigue;
- Post-exertional malaise and/or fatigue
- Sleep dysfunction;
- Pain;
- Neurological/cognitive manifestations (e.g. confusion, impaired concentration, memory difficulties etc.);
- At least one symptom from the following categories: Autonomic manifestations (e.g. lightheadedness, nausea); Neuroendocrine manifestations (sweating etc.); Immune manifestations (tender lymph nodes, sore throats etc.);
- The illness persists for at least six months. The HSE is currently reviewing the information it provides on ME on its website.

These are assessments/tests which can be carried out in a primary care setting by the General Practitioner. Specialised tests may be required when considering differential diagnoses. Treatment for M.E. is based on the individuals' symptoms. In general these treatments are delivered within the context of primary care, with referrals into secondary care for specialist interventions in the areas of Neurology, Rheumatology, Pain Specialists, Endocrinology, Immunology, Cardiology and gastroenterology.

These services are generally accessed through Out-patient clinics at secondary care level by the relevant specialty. My department will keep the question of any HSE working group in this area under review. The HSE is currently working on how best to improve access to these services and the work of the Outpatient Services Improvement Programme should see significant improvements relating to access to appropriate services, including for patients with ME in the coming months.

Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 192.

Hospital Admissions

214. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) is immediately admitted to the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore to have a procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23714/17]

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

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

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

215. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the costs regarding the increased quotation from €600,000 to the latest quote for the building of the new children's hospital; the reason for the increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23722/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An internationally recognised design team, supported by an experienced National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) and Project Team are in place to drive the project to develop the new children's hospital and focus on delivering the project in accordance with national policy to optimal design and value for money. They have followed best international design, planning and procurement processes at each stage of the project.

In 2014 the Exchequer approved €650m of HSE capital funding following an initial cost estimate of the construction aspects of the new children's hospital project. This covered the core elements (new children's hospital and 2 Paediatric OPD and Urgent Care Centres) of the hospital construction only. The €650m funding did not include equipment, educational facili-

ties or commercial elements such as retail and car parking. Alternative funding sources were identified for these elements, estimated to cost €140m. This brought the NPHDB 2014 cost estimate to €790m. In 2015, additional shared services for the campus were included in the project bringing the overall cost estimate to €800m.

Following the evaluation by the NPHDB in early 2017 of main construction tenders and the selection of preferred contractors, the final cost of the design, build and equipment programme for which the NPHDB is responsible has increased. This increase has been led primarily by three factors. First, there has been an increase in projected construction inflation over the project duration of 2014-2021. At the time of the cost estimate in 2014, construction inflation was running at 3% per annum in 2014 and is now running at over 9% per annum. Second, the extended programme timeframe has seen longer than anticipated planning, procurement and approvals processes. Third, market costs of the tenders came in at higher than forecast. These three factors bring the cost from the estimate of €800m to €983m for all elements of construction cost and equipping. Of the €983m, some €916m is Exchequer capital and €67m is to be funded through commercial and philanthropy sources. The final construction elements of the project compare favourably to the costs of international projects of a similar size and scale.

Hospital Investigations

216. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if an internal investigation was carried out on the complications arising from the delivery of a person (details supplied) at Portiuncula Hospital 25 years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23728/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Given the date of birth, this particular case does not fall within the scope of the current Portiuncula University Hospital Maternity Review.

The Department is following up with the Saolta University Healthcare Group with respect to this case.

In relation to the particular query raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

217. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the number of multiple sclerosis patients waiting for three months, six months and a year or more for an appointment to see a neurologist in tabular form. [23729/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the impact of this on people's lives. Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities.

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.

The National Clinical Programme for Neurology Model of Care was launched by the Director General of the HSE on the 27 September 2016 and the HSE is now working towards its implementation.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

218. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the number of multiple sclerosis patients waiting for three months, six months and a year or more for an appointment to have an MRI scan in tabular form. [23730/17]

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

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Provision

219. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding the HSE has provided for neuro-rehabilitation services and home care for multiple sclerosis patients in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of multiple sclerosis patients who are on a waiting list to access neuro-rehabilitation services and home care services. [23731/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Expenditure

220. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the HSE budget for information technology in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23735/17]

225. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated expenditure on information technology in the capital plan to 2021; and the amount that has been drawn down to date. [23740/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 225 together.

The HSE information and communications technology (ICT) expenditure is made in two areas - the Capital ICT expenditure which focuses on ICT equipment, ICT projects and new ICT developments such as the Maternal and New Born Clinical Management System and Revenue which supports the operational costs related to ICT.

The outturn for ICT in each of the years 2012 to 2016 is set out in tabular form in the table below for both Capital and Revenue.

HSE ICT 2012-2017

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 Pro- jected
Capital	€22m	€39m	€39m	€53m	€52m	€55m
Revenue	€86m	€87m	€95m	€100m	€112m	€121m

The capital ICT allocation in the 2017 capital plan is €55.0m. Of the €55.0m capital allocation, current ICT capital expenditure to the end of April 2017 has been €11.3m.

The capital provision for eHealth and ICT projected to 2021 is set out below and allows for

a multi-annual rolling programme of work on multiple projects. The capital provision set out does not include provision for the full costs outlined in the New Children's Hospital ICT business case nor for the national Electronic Health Record (EHR) business case. In association with the HSE, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other stakeholders, my Department is evaluating the EHR business case and working to secure increases in public investment in eHealth in the context of the Mid-Term Capital Review that will be completed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform by Autumn 2017.

ICT Projected Capital Requirements 2017-2021:

2017	2018	2019:	2020	2021
€55m	€60m	€70m	€85m	€87m

HSE Expenditure

221. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE has spent upgrading and updating information systems in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23736/17]

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

HSE Expenditure

222. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE has spent on software to combat malware and cyber attacks in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23737/17]

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

Cyber Security Policy

223. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of computers provided by the HSE to staff; and the number which have had software upgrades in each of the past five years with a view to strengthening protection against cyber attacks. [23738/17]

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

Cyber Security Policy

224. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of computers provided by the HSE to staff; and the number of each that came into service in each of the past ten years. [23739/17]

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

Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 220.

Hospital Consultant Contracts

226. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital consultants currently employed on a full-time permanent basis; the number employed on a temporary basis; the number on the specialist register; and the number not on the specialist register [23741/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Consultant Contracts

227. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time hospital consultants who have left the health service in each of the past four years. [23742/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Cancer Incidence

228. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if survival rates for ovarian cancer are less here than in other EU and OECD countries; if so, the action being taken to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23743/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The latest available data which compares ovarian cancer survival in Ireland to other countries around the world is the CONCORD-2 study, which was published in 2014. For the period studied, 1995-2009, patients with ovarian cancer in Ireland had an average five year survival rate of 30%, the lowest of all the EU and OECD countries included in the study. However, survival rates for ovarian cancer in Ireland have since improved, and the five year survival rate is now 35% for patients diagnosed between 2009 and 2013.

The HSE National Cancer Control Programme has developed GP guidelines on ovarian cancer which highlight the symptoms and appropriate investigations for women with suspected ovarian cancer. These guidelines have been distributed to GPs nationally. They recommend a combination of CA125 testing and ultrasound testing on patients with suspicious clinical features and referral for specialist opinion depending on the patient's clinical examination and the results of investigations.

The development of a new National Cancer Strategy is nearing finalisation and I intend to bring the Strategy to Government shortly. Significant improvements have been made in cancer care in recent years under the previous cancer strategy. Outcomes have improved and overall five year cancer survival is now at 61%. The new National Cancer Strategy will aim to build on this success and will provide the overall strategic direction for cancer control for the next decade.

Hospital Services

229. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when the promised mobile cath lab for County Waterford will be deployed; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23758/17]

230. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if a business plan and funding proposal for a mobile cath laboratory for University Hospital Waterford was submitted by University Hospital Waterford to the South Southwest Hospital Group; the date of its submission; if it has been accepted; if the funding is in place; the amount which has been provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23759/17]

240. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when the promised mobile cath laboratory for County Waterford will be deployed; the length of time it will be deployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23917/17]

241. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if a business plan and funding proposal for a mobile cath laboratory for University Hospital Waterford was submitted to the South Southwest Hospital Group; the date of its submission; if it has been accepted; if the funding is in place; the amount provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23918/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229, 230, 240 and 241 together.

I have formally approved the deployment of a mobile cath lab at UHW for a specific period during 2017. As recommended by the Herity report, an additional €500,000 has been allocated to the hospital for 2017. I have asked the HSE to maximise the benefit for patients from that funding, in respect of both additional sessions at the existing cath lab and the temporary use of a mobile cath lab for a specific period and expect further details to be available shortly.

Health Services Staff Data

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) had a contract to work as a psychologist for the south eastern health board in 1995 and 1996; and if they continued to work in private practice in County Wexford until 1998. [23779/17]

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.

Cyber Security Policy

232. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE personnel assigned to cyber security in each of the years 2012 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23785/17]

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

Cyber Security Policy

233. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the recommendations and requirements given to publicly funded hospitals on cyber security; the amount spent on cyber

security by the HSE in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23793/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Within the HSE the Office of the Chief Information Officer has responsibility for information security, information governance and cyber prevention across the HSE including HSE acute hospitals and Community Health Organisations and regularly inform all business units users within the HSE on information security issues and best practice. Along with managing the HSE's own ICT estate and assets they also manage shared applications and services that exist in voluntary hospitals and other providers. These agencies in turn have responsibility for local ICT security and assets in relation to their own systems. The Office of the Chief Information Officer also manages the health networks that connect many health care facilities across the country. Other activities in terms of cyber security are ensuring that the infrastructure, including the data networks, file servers and personal computers are securely maintained with anti virus software and updates. In addition, other services provided include managing perimeter security devices such as firewalls, monitoring tools, anti-virus and mal-ware detection systems and software. Staff training and awareness is also a critical element in providing a defence against cyber attacks and is provided by the Office of the Chief Information Officer. In that regard it is difficult to quantify those costs elements that are security related from other management activities. As other cyber related costs are not routinely available I will instruct the HSE to provide a more comprehensive breakdown of figures in relation to cyber costs to the Deputy. In relation to anti virus software the HSE spend approximately €0.5m per annum.

As the Deputy is aware, the last week has brought home to us the importance of digital technology supports in the provision of modern health and social care services and the threats that cyber attacks can bring to undermining those services. The HSE first became aware on Friday last of a major cyber security threat in the form of a 'ransomware' attack on its infrastructure. The CIO's Office coordinated and organised a comprehensive response to the cyber attacks in the last week including developing the #ThinkB4Uclick

information campaign across the health services. Similar attacks were threatening the national Health Services in the UK and many other countries. Such attacks pose a serious threat to the provision of health services and the priority at all times is to ensure that patient safety is not compromised, particularly in relation to the provision of clinical services. It is a critical priority to protect the confidentiality of patient data. In relation to the current cyber incident the HSE and the Department are working in close cooperation with the National Cyber Security Centre and with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Property Transfers

234. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the buildings, including each publicly funded hospital, clinic, nursing home or health related building and equipment worth in excess of €10,000 that were transferred in whole or in part from his Department, the HSE or a body under the aegis of his Department or the HSE to a religious order or body or a voluntary body in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the name of the religious order or body in question; the date of transfer; the value and purpose of the transfer; the consideration which was paid to the Exchequer in return for the transfer of each of these assets; the details of each building including each publicly funded hospital, clinic, nursing home or health related building currently under construction which is being funded by his department or the HSE and in which it is intended to transfer in whole or in part to a religious order or body or a voluntary

body; the projected value of the transfer; the purpose of the transfer; the amount spent to date; and the details of equipment that is intended to be transferred [23812/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has not transferred buildings or equipment worth in excess of €10,000 to a religious order or body or a voluntary body.

In relation to the Health Service Executive and agencies under its remit the information sought will take some time to collate and my Department will liaise with the HSE in this regard. However, it is important to note that building works and equipment are made available to voluntary agencies in support of their various remits in the delivery of specific health care services. The Health Service Executive has in place processes and procedures which protect the State's interest. These are set out in the Executive's Protocol for the Acquisition and Disposal of Property and its National Financial Regulation 18.

Given the remit of the other smaller agencies under the aegis of my Department, these agencies do not deliver the type of health care services which would necessitate their access to or need for the type of buildings and equipment described in the question. Therefore, it is suggested that if this element of the query is to be further explored the Deputy should contact the relevant CEO/Director/Chairperson.

National Maternity Hospital

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he has received correspondence (details supplied) from campaigners in County Donegal regarding the national maternity hospital; if a response has been issued to the correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23814/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Private Office has confirmed that the correspondence referred to by the Deputy, which is dated 12 May, has been received. The letter is being processed and a reply will issue shortly.

Misuse of Drugs

236. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a nationwide growth in the supply and usage of the drug fentanyl, an opioid believed to be 100 times more potent than heroin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23886/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid and has legitimate medical use in anaesthesia and analgesia. Fentanyls are extremely potent and even the smallest amount of the substance can cause overdose and death. Fentanyl may also be absorbed through the skin. The effects of the drug may be indistinguishable from Heroin, meaning that Heroin users may be at risk of unwittingly consuming this substance.

The Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2017, made under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 to 2016, are the primary legislative instrument regulating the import, export, manufacture, production, prescribing, supply, possession and administration of controlled drugs. The Regulations categorise controlled drug substances into five schedules (ranging from the most tightly controlled in Schedule 1 to the least tightly controlled in Schedule 5). Under the Regulations Fentanyl is a Schedule 2 substance.

I am informed that the Health Service Executive (HSE) last issued an alert for Fentanyl on 28 July 2016, arising from a number of drug-related deaths in Dublin and Cork. The HSE has not issued any further alerts since then, as there is no evidence to suggest this substance is currently in circulation in this jurisdiction. However, the HSE remain vigilant for the possibility of Fentanyl entering circulation in Ireland.

Home Help Service Provision

237. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the reason home help hours in the HSE's Dublin west area have remained unchanged in the past 12 months in view of the Government's commitment to increasing home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23888/17]

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.

Local Drugs Task Forces Funding

238. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the reason the funding allocation for drug task forces has remained at the same reduced level for the past four years in view of an ever increasing demand for these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23894/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): In line with the National Drugs Strategy, the Government is committed to continuing support for initiatives to tackle the drug problem. In the 2017 budget, an additional €3m has been provided for a number of measures aimed at improving the health outcomes of those affected by addiction issues. The increased funding will support the development of a pilot supervised injection facility in Dublin city centre, the wider availability of alternative opiate substitution treatments for those who are not suited to methadone, improved services for under 18s and more detoxification beds.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in their areas and in coordinating action at local level, so that there is a targeted response to the problem of substance misuse in local communities. Every effort has been made to protect the budgets of Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in recent years. In excess of €27.6m has been allocated to the Task Forces for community-based drugs initiatives this year, the same amount provided in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

The Department of Health has commissioned external consultants to develop a performance measurement framework to assist in measuring the effectiveness of Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. The framework will provide a mechanism to target funding allocations on the basis of objective criteria, having regard to the drugs situation in the Task Force catchment areas and other demographic factors. It will also inform the question of how best to align Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in order to address locally identified needs. I understand the findings of the consultants report have been considered by the steering group in the context of the development of the new National Drugs Strategy.

The funding available to address substance misuse will be kept under review in the context of the overall resources available to the health services and the most effective utilisation of those resources.

18 May 2017

Nursing Staff Recruitment

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding psychiatric nursing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23898/17]

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.

Questions Nos. 240 and 241 answered with Question No. 229.

GLAS Payments

242. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will receive a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23631/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% advance payment for 2016 was paid to the person named in December 2016. The balancing payments for 2016 will be processed in due course according to the regulatory requirements.

Forestry Management

243. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if plans can be put in place to increase the distances for planting forestry from residential homes in view of the recent gorse fires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23673/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is conscious of the implications of planting near private residences, which is taken into account at the pre-approval stage of forestry applications. My Department's publication Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (2016) provides guidance on establishing plantations in accordance with good forest practice, with reference to environmental considerations. A set-back distance from dwelling houses and associated buildings of 60 metres, or 30 metres with the written consent of the dwelling owner is a requirement of the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme.

The setback minimum distance of 30 metres is in line with established international norms for defensible space around structures, and as such the standard 60 metres forest setback as standard should be more than adequate to protect homes and structures in Irish conditions.

It should be noted that where structures have been damaged in the recent past, this has been in situations where other non-forest vegetation has been permitted to encroach on the defensible space, or where structures have been developed adjacent to pre-existing forest plantations without planning for the necessary separation distance. These situations are outside of the control or remit of my Department.

It is essential that all rural residents assess the risks of fire to their homes regularly and treat hazardous vegetation to reduce this risk. It is most important that access to homes is kept clear

and that high risk features such as heating oil tanks and gas storage units are located away from any potential fire hazard.

While the prescribed 60 metres set-back will suffice in most cases, the Department may require a greater set-back or indeed the exclusion of sections of a proposed site, if deemed necessary on landscape grounds.

In recent years my Department has developed considerable technical expertise around fire management, in conjunction with international fire management organisations and partners. The Forest Service monitors fire risk daily throughout the main fire risk period and provides Fire Danger Notices that ensure that forest managers and owners are aware of prevailing fire risks and can take appropriate preventative actions.

Applicants, Registered Foresters and other land owners must take into account the long-term implications of managing large open areas adjoining properties and the potential fire hazards associated with scrub encroachment. Forestry is not a fire risk in itself. Reports note that the majority of the recent fires appear to have been started deliberately and illegally on heather or gorse, which quickly spread to engulf forestry.

The burning of vegetation is controlled by the Wildlife Acts and it is an offence under Section 40 of the Wildlife Act, 1976 (amended by Section 46 of the Wildlife Act, 2000) to burn from 1st March to 31st August in any year, any vegetation growing on any land not then cultivated. Individuals who are found to burn vegetation within that prohibited period are liable to prosecution by An Garda Síochána or by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). My Department has no role in regard to prosecutions. Land found to have been burned during the specified closed season for burning is considered automatically ineligible under the various support schemes.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

244. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received under AEOS; the number of approvals issued; the payments claims lodged and the number of cases approved for payment by county in 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number of persons who have been approved for AEOS who have yet to receive payment in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23674/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place before payments can be made. As 2016 is the final year for AEOS 2 participants re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This process is on-going with payments being made as cases are finalised.

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Carlow	49	43	6
Cavan	244	208	36
Clare	556	484	72
Cork	428	366	62
Donegal	1360	1,190	170
Dublin	9	9	0

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Galway	1245	1,081	164
Kerry	568	490	78
Kildare	39	32	7
Kilkenny	109	93	16
Laois	80	59	21
Leitrim	430	381	49
Limerick	224	183	41
Longford	89	74	15
Louth	41	32	9
Mayo	1399	1,262	137
Meath	83	74	9
Monaghan	151	115	36
Offaly	110	96	14
Roscommon	478	428	50
Sligo	335	298	37
Tipperary	245	189	56
Waterford	82	71	11
Westmeath	122	92	30
Wexford	84	57	27
Wicklow	80	67	13
Totals	8640	7,474	1166

Coillte Teoranta Activities

245. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason Coillte has stopped afforesting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23695/17]

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 forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that the company does not qualify for the afforestation grants and premium payments that are available to the private forest sector under the Forestry Programme, which are an incentive for other landowners to afforest their land. Coillte added that, notwithstanding this ineligibility, the company continues to look for options to establish new forests where it makes commercial sense to do so and is actively considering the role it can play in facilitating the overall growth of the national forest estate. The company further advise that it has recently taken steps to play a role in the private forestry sector through the launch of its Coillte Premium Partners initiative, which is aimed at strengthening the broader industry and on increasing the mobilisation of the private timber resource.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

246. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) did not receive an ANC payment for 2016 in view of the fact that they had sufficient stock on their farm to qualify; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [23768/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 9 May 2016.

Under the 2016 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Payment under the ANC scheme has not issued in this case as the holding concerned has not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements.

The Terms and Conditions of the 2016 ANC Scheme sets out that, equines in order to be considered as qualifying livestock, must be registered in accordance with EU Regulation 504/2008. Processing of the application under 2016 scheme year identified that of the three equines submitted, only one was eligible for consideration and therefore as the holding concerned had not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements as outlined in the Terms and Conditions, the eligibility criteria for payment have not been met.

The person named was notified of this finding on 24 October 2016 and advised to contact the ANC section with any further observations. To date no further correspondence has been received from the person named.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

247. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an aquacultural licence will be granted to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23789/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application for an aquaculture licence referred to by the Deputy is in respect of a site located in Castlemaine Harbour, which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 site).

All applications in 'Natura' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. My Department, in conjunction with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is engaged in a comprehensive programme of gathering the necessary baseline data appropriate to the Conservation Objectives of 'Natura' areas. This data collection programme is substantially complete. This is followed by data analysis and the setting of appropriate Conservation Objectives by the NPWS. Once this process is complete all new, renewal and review aquaculture applications can be appropriately assessed for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The Appropriate Assessment of Castlemaine Harbour has been completed and the relevant licensing determinations have been made based on applications to hand at the time of the assessment.

The specific application referred to by the Deputy was submitted to my Department subsequent to the carrying out of the Appropriate Assessment process for this harbour. Accordingly, it was not possible to assess this application against the designated Conservation Objectives for the harbour.

The optimum method for appropriately assessing applications by individual operators, who were not included in the initial overall assessment procedure, is under active consideration by my Department. The process must comply with best scientific practice and be achieved in a manner which will be acceptable to the national authorities and to the EU Commission.

In the meantime, the assessment procedures agreed with the EU Commission require Appropriate Assessments in respect of aquaculture activities to be carried out by the national authorities and unilateral departure from these arrangements is not possible.

Every effort is being made to expedite the conclusion of this matter as soon as possible.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 221 of 11 May 2017, the number of applications for payment that failed to meet these requirements in each respective year; the number of persons who subsequently became eligible for payment in each year; the amount of moneys that remain unused from each specific year in which the ceiling has not been utilised in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23794/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is currently being complied. It will be forwarded to the Deputy directly as soon as it is finalised.

GLAS Applications

249. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 235 of 11 May 2017, when the rural development programme in question was submitted and subsequently published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23795/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 -2020 was formally submitted to the EU Commission for approval on 3 July, 2014. There followed a period during which Commission observations were dealt with and the final approved version of the Programme was published on 28 May 2015.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

250. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 238 of 11 May 2017, the percentage that the greening payment comprises of the total value of entitlements activated in each county based on 2016 data under the 2016 greening scheme in pillar 1 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23796/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is currently being complied. It will be forwarded to the Deputy directly as soon as it is finalised.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

251. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in 2016 who received a greening payment by county in tabular form. [23797/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As requested please see below the number of persons in 2016 that received a greening payment by county in tabular form.

County	Number Paid
CARLOW	1606
CAVAN	4736
CLARE	5991
CORK	12828
DONEGAL	8278
DUBLIN	628
GALWAY	11848
KERRY	7624
KILDARE	2057
KILKENNY	3386
LAOIS	2917
LEITRIM	3374
LIMERICK	4998
LONGFORD	2341
LOUTH	1505
MAYO	11315
MEATH	3752
MONAGHAN	3988
OFFALY	3031
ROSCOMMON	5612
SLIGO	3905
TIPPERARY	6855
WATERFORD	2389
WESTMEATH	2945
WEXFORD	4031
WICKLOW	2131
Total	124071

Fish Quotas

252. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the mackerel review; the number of submissions received; the number of meetings he has had with industry stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23798/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy may be aware, I received a request from the Irish South and West Fish Producer Organisation to

allocate the increase over 2016 of Ireland's mackerel quota for 2017 entirely to the Polyvalent Segment on a 1 year pilot basis in exchange for the recipient vessels forgoing demersal fishing in order to gauge the impact on the demersal vessels.

This matter has generated a lot of discussion in the industry and I have received many representations on the matter. Having carefully considered the matter, I decided that, without prejudice, there is a case for a review of the policy on allocations between the RSW Pelagic segment and the polyvalent segment of the fleet, taking account of request by the IS&WFO. In that regard, I decided that I am restricting consideration to the increased quota for Ireland in 2017 over that in 2016.

It is important to note that I have not made any decision at this time to change the allocations between the segments in respect of this part of the quota. All relevant issues will be carefully evaluated and subject to a full consultation with stakeholders before I decide if any amendment to the policy is justified for the proper and effective management of the mackerel fishery.

The public consultation process concluded on 28th February 2017 and 353 submissions were received. All submissions are currently being evaluated.

To support transparency in this process, all views received on the Consultation Document are now publicly available on the Department's website. Following the closure of the formal consultation process, any meeting that may be held with stakeholders will be open to all interested stakeholders that have engaged in the public consultation.

I can inform the Deputy that on 21st February 2017 I attended by invitation the Annual General Meeting of the Irish Fish Processors and Exports Association (IFPEA) at which the above matter was among a number of issues discussed. A report of that meeting is available to view on the website of my Department.

Food Exports

253. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar imports from Northern Ireland to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23799/17]

254. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar exports to Northern Ireland to date in 2017. [23800/17]

255. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of liquid milk exports to Northern Ireland to date in 2017. [23801/17]

256. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of liquid milk imports from Northern Ireland to date in 2017. [23802/17]

257. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient exports to Northern Ireland to date in 2017. [23803/17]

258. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient imports from Northern Ireland to date in 2017. [23804/17]

259. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the volume and value of dairy ingredient exports to the UK excluding Northern Ireland to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23805/17]

260. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of dairy ingredient imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23806/17]

261. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar exports to the UK excluding Northern Ireland to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23807/17]

262. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of cheddar imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23808/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 253 to 262, inclusive, together.

The Deputy has requested various details in respect of dairy trade between Ireland and Britain/Northern Ireland, across a range of product categories, for the year 2017 to date. The CSO, this week on Tuesday 16th May, released provisional trade data for the period January to March 2017 inclusive. This is set out in the attached table.

For cheese, a percentage estimate is included in respect of cheddar as a proportion of the total cheese category. It should be noted that the data as compiled is based on CSO preliminary estimates which will be subject to periodic revision based on updated trade statistics.

GREAT BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND DAIRY TRADE - JAN to MARCH 2017									
GEO-GRAPHIC ENTITY				GREAT BRITAIN					NORTHERN IRELAND
TRADE FLOW		Exports		Imports			Exports		Imports
PRODUCT CATEGORY	€	Tonnes	€	Tonnes		€	Tonnes	€	Tonnes
Milk	1.3	1,455	3.8	8,586		3.5	13,658	48.0	154,388
Cream	2.3	868	0.1	58		1.7	1,092	1.3	695
SMP	3.5	1,800	5.1	5,265		0.1	20	0.01	6
WMP	2.0	992	1.5	1,199		1.0	481	0.3	539
Yoghurt	4.8	1,595	6.8	4,210		0.4	112	0.2	230
Buttermilk	1.7	1,268	4.1	2,337		0.3	159	0.5	2,190
Ice Cream	1.8	870	5.3	3,452		0.5	344	0.1	76
Whey	3.9	3,576	2.1	2,070		0.2	228	0.3	1,380
Butter	42.2	10,808	5.8	1,921		6.0	1,533	0.2	96
Cheese	79.6	23,049	29.6	7,394		0.5	142	0.1	36
OF WHICH Cheddar % (est)	55.7%	63.7%	35.6%	42.2%		47.9%	51.6%	41.4%	48.3%
IF	38.6	9,378	1.6	307		0.03	45	0.01	2
FFMP	4.5	1,943	2.8	602		0.7	349	0.03	9
Caseines & Caseinates	4.1	660	0.05	23		0.001	0.1	–	–

TOTAL TRADE	191.0	58,616	69.9	38,280		15.0	18,188	51.2	159,680
-------------	-------	--------	------	--------	--	------	--------	------	---------

GLAS Data

263. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 who have received 85% of their total 2016 payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients who have yet to receive payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23809/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the following table.

County	Number Sent for Payment	GLAS 1		GLAS 2		
		Number with PPV Pass	Unpaid	Number Sent for Payment	Number with PPV Pass	Unpaid
Carlow	259	1	19	120	0	8
Cavan	865	1	44	419	0	13
Clare	1,525	0	92	673	0	18
Cork	2,004	2	163	951	2	61
Donegal	1,844	2	107	959	4	48
Dublin	56	0	7	15	0	2
Galway	2,840	1	258	1,217	3	94
Kerry	1,682	2	95	838	3	36
Kildare	226	0	24	75	0	7
Kilkenny	405	1	27	196	0	16
Laois	345	0	26	186	0	11
Leitrim	961	0	63	404	0	16
Limerick	995	0	60	290	1	11
Longford	483	0	34	337	0	12
Louth	130	0	18	76	0	4
Mayo	2,362	0	204	1,207	4	122
Meath	392	0	35	186	0	18
Monaghan	542	0	36	138	0	8
Offaly	452	1	23	260	2	18
Roscommon	1,446	0	89	532	1	21
Sligo	899	0	49	354	0	15
Tipperary	1,047	5	87	483	0	30
Waterford	320	3	41	116	0	16
Westmeath	603	3	46	253	0	11
Wexford	665	0	110	242	0	28
Wicklow	296	0	36	146	0	9
	23,644	22	1,793	10,673	20	653

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

264. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for AEOS who have received their total 2016 payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of AEOS recipients who have yet to receive payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23810/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place before payments are made. As 2016 is the final year for AEOS 2 participants re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This process is on-going and payments are made as cases are finalised.

Draft TT

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Payment
Carlow	49	43	6
Cavan	244	208	36
Clare	556	484	72
Cork	428	366	62
Donegal	1360	1,190	170
Dublin	9	9	0
Galway	1245	1,081	164
Kerry	568	490	78
Kildare	39	32	7
Kilkenny	109	93	16
Laois	80	59	21
Leitrim	430	381	49
Limerick	224	183	41
Longford	89	74	15
Louth	41	32	9
Mayo	1399	1,262	137
Meath	83	74	9
Monaghan	151	115	36
Offaly	110	96	14
Roscommon	478	428	50
Sligo	335	298	37
Tipperary	245	189	56
Waterford	82	71	11
Westmeath	122	92	30
Wexford	84	57	27
Wicklow	80	67	13
Totals	8640	7,474	1166

GLAS Payments

265. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a GLAS payment for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23821/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working on the issue with a view to further processing the 2016 payment.

Mobile Telephony Services

266. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the implementation of the 40 actions identified by the mobile phone and broadband task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23608/17]

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

In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, Com-Reg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers.

Implementation of the actions identified by the Taskforce will allow the business opportunities and benefits that the growth in the digital economy is bringing to be felt across the entire country. It will also assist in the creation of a digital infrastructure that can support this growth, and that can provide nationwide coverage with sufficient capacity to ensure that data can flow at the volume, speed and reliability required to meet the demands of modern life. Implementation of these actions will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In order to maintain momentum created by the Task Force, I, together with Minister Humphreys, have established an Implementation Group. This group is driving and monitoring the implementation of the actions, bringing together all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery. This group will be formally reporting every 90 days on progress made on all actions to both myself and Minister Humphreys.

The first meeting of the Implementation Group took place on 8 March, and was followed by a series of bilateral meetings with action holders. These discussions have formed the basis of the first quarterly progress report, which I, together with Minister Humphreys, expect to publish shortly. This report will show that considerable progress has been made, particularly in

relation to the implementation of actions identified for Q1 2017.

The Implementation Group is also tasked with comprehensively reviewing progress made after twelve months, and producing an annual report summarising progress across all actions. The Group is also mandated to recommend further actions that would result in an improved service for consumers.

The benefits that the implementation of the actions in the Task Force report will bring will be felt across Ireland.

Energy Policy Review

267. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the Moneypoint working group; the number of times that this group has met since its establishment; and the date by which the group will publish its findings. [23611/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper, ‘Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030’, published in December 2015, notes that Moneypoint, Ireland’s only coal burning power station, contributes to diversifying Ireland’s fuel mix and the provision of competitively priced electricity. The station is owned by the ESB and the White Paper recognises that key decisions on its future will have to be taken before 2020 as the station will reach the end of its operating life in its current configuration in 2025. In addition, the White Paper recognises that increasing ‘cost of carbon’ charges on Green House Gas emissions will drive up the cost of carbon-intensive energy sources and lead firms and consumers to adopt low carbon fuels and energy efficient technologies. It is anticipated therefore that the phasing out of higher carbon fuels will be achieved by a combination of sustainable policy measures and consumer reaction to the higher price of carbon intensive fuels.

The May 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to establish a National Dialogue on Climate Change, with one of its tasks to identify the most suitable replacement low-carbon generation technology for Moneypoint. This builds on the commitment in the Energy White Paper to establish a National Energy Forum to maximise and maintain consensus on the broad policy measures set out in the White Paper required to ensure the transition to a low-carbon energy future.

The future of Moneypoint is multifaceted and requires consideration of issues such as security of supply, system stability, competitiveness and sustainability. The working group set up in my Department is an internal group of officials working together to examine the key considerations in relation to the future of Moneypoint, including the overall fuel mix in the energy sector, analysis undertaken to date in relation to Moneypoint, and appropriate further research if considered necessary. The group consists of senior energy officials and meets as part of existing meeting structures.

The objective of this working group is to gather the information and research necessary in order to inform policy decisions that relate to the future of Moneypoint.

Key decisions on the future of Moneypoint will be taken before 2020. These decisions are likely to include policy decisions which will be made by me as Minister and commercial decisions which will be made by the ESB as owners and operators of Moneypoint.

Cyber Security Policy

268. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has had contact with the US authorities regarding a National Security Agency information technology hacking breach and its link to recent malware information technology attacks across the globe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23817/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The major cyber attack that occurred globally in recent days is unprecedented in terms of scale and speed of onset. Whereas ransomware attacks via malicious e-mail attachment have become commonplace, this newly discovered malware type, generally referred to as WannaCry2 possesses the ability to spread very rapidly from machine to machine without any user intervention. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) monitored the situation on Friday and over the weekend, and engaged with national and international stakeholders, coordinating the national response and informing Government of developments. The NCSC also issued a series of Advisory notices to Government Departments and Agencies over the weekend as this issue developed and more became known about the malware. The impact of this on Ireland was limited, but further variants are expected to be developed and there is a high risk that further incidents of this type will arise again in the future. The NCSC is conducting a review of the response to recent events, and I will bring any recommendations arising to Government in due course. The NCSC remains in close contact with international counterparts, including the authorities in the United States and with public and private sector entities in Ireland, particularly with regard to ensuring that the impact of any future variants of this malware are mitigated.

Cyber Security Policy

269. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the strategy documents and information notes used in awareness campaigns to make SMEs safe from cyber attacks published by his Department since 2011. [23826/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The major cyber attack that occurred globally in recent days is unprecedented in terms of scale and speed of onset. Whereas ransomware attacks via malicious e-mail attachment have become commonplace, this newly discovered malware type, generally referred to as WannaCry2 possesses the ability to spread very rapidly from machine to machine without any user intervention. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) monitored the situation on Friday and over the weekend, and engaged with national and international stakeholders, coordinating the national response and informing Government of developments. The NCSC also issued a series of Advisory notices to Government Departments and Agencies over the weekend as this issue developed and more became known about the malware. The impact of this on Ireland was limited, but further variants are expected to be developed and there is a high risk that further incidents of this type will arise again in the future. The NCSC is conducting a review of the response to recent events, and will bring any recommendations arising to Government in due course. The focus of the NCSC in the period since 2015, as set out in the National Cyber Security Strategy, has been to roll out a functional incident response capability, to improve the security of Government ICT and to prepare for the transposition of the Network and Information Security Directive. All of these deliverables are well underway but significant challenges persist. The NCSC has also developed a website MakeITsecure.ie to providing support to individuals and to small businesses around IT security. This site will be redeveloped in the coming months, but only once existing critical tasks are further advanced. The responsibility

for the safety and security of IT systems rests with the owners of those systems, at all times. The NCSC has a set of specific roles with regard to the security of Government and certain key infrastructure IT systems, but even in those cases, operational responsibility for security rests with the organisations that own and operate those systems. While the NCSC will continue to evolve its information provision offering to businesses and private individuals, it will not be acting as an incident response team for anyone other than Government institutions.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Data

270. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the median and average grant amounts under the better energy homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23612/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. The scheme provides grant aid to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating systems upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER). Over the course of 2016, a total of €17,028,842 was paid out to 15,265 grant recipients who undertook 36,099 individual energy efficiency measures. This resulted in an average grant payment of €1,115 in 2016. Since the grants available under the scheme were set to support approximately 30% of the total cost of each measure, this suggests that the average participant in the Better Energy Homes Scheme invested slightly over €3,700 in 2016.

The median grant amount paid out in 2016 was €750. The most popular individual efficiency measure (excluding the mandatory BER) was attic insulation, which carries a grant of €300. 5,279 households received grant support for attic insulation.

Interdepartmental Working Groups

271. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times the interdepartmental low emissions task force has met since its formation. [23613/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, with the support of the Department of An Taoiseach, have convened an interdepartmental Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) Task Force to consider the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon technologies in line with the Programme for Government commitment. The role of the Task Force is to examine and make recommendations on a range of potential stimulus, to examine options such as grants, tax incentives, tolls and parking. Other issues such as infrastructure, legislation and public leadership are also part of the work programme.

The LEV Task Force has begun its work and has divided its work into three work streams which have been assigned as follows:

- Working Group 1 - Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility (WG1);
- Working Group 2 - Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing (WG2); and

- Working Group 3 - Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership (WG3).

In addition, the work programme of the Task Force has been divided into two phases. The first will focus solely on electric vehicles and the second phase will focus on all other alternative fuels.

The Task Force was convened in December 2016 and since then, WG1 had met on two occasions and WG2 has met once.

The Task Force will also provide an opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to contribute to the issues considered. Progress being made by the Task Force will be available on the website of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Local Authority Staff

272. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the name and contact details for the broadband officers within Cavan and Monaghan County Councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23633/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): One of the many key actions from the Mobile and Broadband Taskforce report to help streamline the roll-out of high speed broadband is the appointment of Broadband Officers. Funding is being provided to all local authorities to assign an officer with responsibility for broadband, acting as a single point of contact for engagement with telecommunications operators building out infrastructure.

The Broadband Officers are now in place in 29 of the 31 local authority areas. The two remaining local authorities (South Dublin County Council and Wicklow County Council) are currently in the process of recruiting Broadband Officers. Cavan County Council Broadband Officer is Mr Kieran Hever, email khever@cavancoco.ie and telephone (049) 4378300. Monaghan County Council Broadband Officer is John McArdle, email jmcardle@monaghancoco.ie and telephone (047) 30500.

I have set out in the following table a list of Broadband Officers and contact details.

Local Authority	Broadband Officer	Email	Telephone
Cavan County	Kieran Hever	khever@cavancoco.ie	(049)4378300
Donegal County	Daragh McDonough	DMCDONAG@donegalcoco.ie	(074)9153900
Galway City	Alfie Jones	Alfie.Jones@Galwaycity.ie	(091)536400
Galway County	Brian Barrett	bbarrett@galwaycoco.ie	(091)509000
Laois County	Antoinette Brennan	AnBrennan@laoiscoco.ie	(057)8664000
Leitrim County	Shane Tiernan	stiernan@leitrimcoco.ie	(071)9620005
Longford County	Christine Collins	ccollins@longfordcoco.ie	(043)3343300

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Broadband Officer	Email	Telephone
Louth County	Paul Mulligan	paul.mulligan@louthcoco.ie	1890 202 303
Mayo County	Stephen Carolan	scarolan@mayo-coco.ie	(094)9024444
Monaghan County	John McArdle	jmcardle@monaghancoco.ie	(047)30500
Offaly County	Ray Bell	rbell@offalycoco.ie	(057)9346800
Roscommon County	Annemarie Johnson	ajohnston@roscommoncoco.ie	(0906)637100
Sligo County	Nigel Carter	ncarter@sligococo.ie	(071)9111111
Westmeath County	Gerry McCormack	gmccorma@westmeathcoco.ie	(044)9332000
Carlow County	Eoin Lyng	elyng@carlowcoco.ie	(059)9170300
Clare County	Urban McMahon	umcmahon@clarecoco.ie	(065)6821616
Cork City	Fergus Gleeson	Fergus_gleeson@corkcoco.ie	(021)4924000
Cork County	Dan O Sullivan	dan.osullivan@corkcoco.ie	(021)4276891
Dublin City Council	Jamie Cudden	jamie.cudden@dublincity.ie	(01)2222222
Dun Laoghaire County	Fergal Kelly	fkelly@dlrcoco.ie	(01)2054700
Fingal County	David Storey	David.Storey@fingal.ie	(01)8727777
Kerry	Diarmuid Reilly	dreilly@kerrycoco.ie	(066)7183500
Kildare County	Evelyn Wright	ewright@kildarecoco.ie	(045)980240
Kilkenny County	Steven Coverdale	steven.coverdale@kilkennycoco.ie	(056)7794138
Limerick County	Mihai Bilauca	mihai.bilauca@limerick.ie	(061)496000
Meath County	Fergus O'Rourke	fergus.orourke@meathcoco.ie	(046)9097000
South Dublin County	Pending		(01)4149000
Tipperary County	Simon Howe	simon.howe@tipperarycoco.ie	(076)1065000
Waterford County	Jack Doyle	jdoyle@waterford-council.ie	(076)1102020
Wexford County	Carolyn Godkin	carolyn.godkin@wexfordcoco.ie	(053)9196000
Wicklow County	Pending		(040)420100

Litter Pollution

273. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment his plans to deal with the issue of dog fouling in counties Cavan and Monaghan and throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23640/17]

282. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount each local authority in Dublin will receive further to his recent announcement to increase funding from the environment fund to combat the prevalence of dog fouling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23885/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273 and 282 together.

Although in 2016, dog fouling constituted just 1.22 per cent of all litter nationally, it is an issue of particular concern to me given its potential impacts on human health, particularly for children.

The Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2009 provide the statutory framework to enable local authorities to combat littering. It is an offence under section 22 of the Acts not to clean up after your dog. I believe that there are sufficient penalties in place, when enforced, to deal with the issue of dog fouling under the Litter Pollution Acts, but ultimately it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that they play their part in preserving the environment for others through the responsible disposal of their litter, including in relation to dog fouling.

Each local authority must determine the most appropriate course of action to tackle litter pollution locally, including the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions in relation to litter and dog fouling, taking account of its own particular circumstances and priorities. Authorised local authority officers and Gardaí may issue a notice or on-the-spot fine to an individual believed of committing a prescribed offence under the Acts.

As part of the targeted direct response to deal with litter, my Department operates an Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS). Under this Scheme, local authorities can apply for funding for projects aimed at raising awareness of litter issues, including that of dog fouling. Local authorities are asked to focus their activities under the scheme on young people and in particular on schools and community groups with an emphasis on encouraging long term behavioural change. It is open to local authorities to utilise some of this funding to improve the situation specifically in relation to dog fouling.

Compared to 2016, I have increased funding for the ALAGS scheme in 2017 by 28% and allocated a total of €885,000 to local authorities this year. I will announce individual local authority allocations very shortly.

Household Benefits Scheme

274. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will reinstate the telephone allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23641/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have no function in relation to this matter. Responsibility for the Household Benefits Package, which includes the Telephone Allowance, rests with the Minister for Social Protection.

Commission for Energy Regulation

275. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has examined the report on the regulation and inspection of gas installers operating here which was published by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications in July 2015; and if he will appoint an independent expert or consultant to conduct a thorough investigation of the extent of illegal activity regarding gas boilers being installed by persons operating outside of the law as recommended in the report. [23664/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Responsibility for the regulation of gas installers with respect to safety of the electricity and gas markets is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). Under the Energy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 the CER is responsible for regulating the activities of gas undertakings and gas installers with respect to safety. The legislation provides that any gas works carried out on domestic gas installers may be carried out only by a Registered Gas Installer (RGI). Under the energy regulatory framework the CER is accountable to a Committee of the Oireachtas and not to the Minister. I therefore do not have any role or function in the matter. Furthermore, paragraph 26 of Schedule 1 of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 provides that the CER “*shall have regard to any recommendations of such Joint Committee relevant to its functions*”. I am informed that the CER responded in detail by letter dated 29 March 2017 to the Joint Committee in the matter of illegal operators within the gas boiler installation industry, and on the other recommendations contained in the report of the Committee.

North-South Interconnector

276. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will ensure that EirGrid does not advance further procurement or pre-construction activities for the North-South interconnector until the study recently announced is completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23679/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): EirGrid is the independent Transmission System Operator in Ireland and SONI (a subsidiary of the EirGrid Group) is the independent Transmission System Operator in Northern Ireland. The role of the independent Transmission System Operator includes the operation, maintenance and development of the electricity transmission network. As Minister, it is not appropriate for me to direct EirGrid in carrying out this role.

As the Deputy is aware, the section of the project in Ireland which received planning permission from An Bord Pleanála in December 2016 is currently the subject of Judicial Review proceedings. The planning process is ongoing in Northern Ireland.

Last Tuesday, 16 May, I met with the Deputy and a number of other Oireachtas members from Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. This meeting provided me the opportunity to update the members on progress in relation to the proposed study and to get feedback. I welcome the Deputy’s participation in the meeting and am considering the feedback I received.

I intend that the study be completed and published before the end of this year. Construction of the project is not planned to commence before 2018 and therefore I envisage no delay to the project as a result of carrying out this study.

Planning Issues

277. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment if he has been consulted by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on proposed changes to the planning status of large scale community extraction; and if he has provided his views in response regarding the impact such changes could have on the carbon sequestration and storage functions of peatlands. [23700/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Large scale peat extraction in Ireland is currently carried out under the Planning Acts, which are the primary responsibility of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. It is proposed that large scale peat extraction will move from the planning regime to become an activity that is licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is an independent agency under the remit of my Department.

As well as other key stakeholders, both my Department and the Agency have engaged on an on-going basis with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in relation to the development of the necessary legislation to give effect to this change of approach. My Department's primary focus is on the environmental aspects, and the practical and licensing implications arising for the EPA, from this change

I understand that the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government anticipates that the legislation will be finalised in the coming months, and my Department and the EPA will continue to engage in this context.

It should be noted that the fact that the consent regime for large scale peat extraction is changing should not inherently give rise to direct implications for changes affecting the sequestration potential or the storage function of peatlands.

Inland Fisheries Ireland Staff

278. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of fisheries protection officers employed by Inland Fisheries Ireland in each of the years 2005 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the number of person hours spent on patrol to protect the fisheries resources in each of those years in tabular form; the number of protection officers who have been transferred to alternative roles in the organisation between 2005 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23711/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the state agency responsible for the protection, management and conservation of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources was established in July 2010 following an amalgamation of the former Central and seven Regional Fishery Boards. IFI's first full year of operation was 2011.

Details of fisheries protection officers employed by IFI in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, are shown in the following table.

Grade	Staff numbers by year						
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Fishery Inspector	28	25	24	23	26	24	24
Assistant Fishery Inspectors	42	41	41	40	38	38	38

Fisheries Officer	107.4	105.4	102.4	96.4	125	130	131
-------------------	-------	-------	-------	------	-----	-----	-----

36 existing Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) staff were upgraded from General operative to the grade of Fisheries Officer in 2015. The new Fisheries Officers received training in the skills and competencies to allow them to enforce fisheries legislation thereby protecting and conserving Ireland's valuable inland fisheries and sea angling resource. Two Fisheries Inspectors were allocated to IFI Business Development during the period 2011-2016. There were a number of location transfers amongst Fisheries Officers, however all of these remained within the protection sphere.

Fisheries patrol data is available for the years 2012 – 2016. The person hours spent on fisheries patrols of freshwater rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal and the sea are as follows:

Year	Person hours on patrol
2012	97,946 *
2013	185,395
2014	180,318
2015	172,196
2016	188,405

*The current method of assessment used to record person hours was adopted in 2013, encompassing a broader range of activities.

Data Protection

279. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the practice by a company (details supplied) that profiles members of the public, including minors, without their consent or an option of opting into its practice; his views on the fact that the information gleaned on minors may be passed onto other third parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23719/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has no function in relation to this matter, which is one for the Data Protection Commissioner, who is independent in the performance of her functions. The question also requests an interpretation of the law.

Wastewater Treatment

280. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the construction of integrated constructed wet lands as a method of wastewater treatment; his further views on whether these are effective methods of wastewater treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23786/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): While my Department has no function in matters of water policy, I understand that the then Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (now the *Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government*), published an official guidance document, entitled, 'Integrated Constructed Wetlands - Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications' in November 2010. Furthermore, I understand that funding was provided for the installation of a number of integrated constructed wetlands

through the water services capital programme. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, *inter alia*, through the delivery of water services capital infrastructure, including in relation to waste water treatment.

The guidance document can be downloaded from the website of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government at the following link

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Environment/Water/FileDownload%2C24931%2Cen.pdf>

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

281. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated amount of percentage points by which Ireland will miss the target on renewable energy services in view of the fact it is widely reported that Ireland will not meet the target of meeting 16% of energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020 as set out in a legally binding target by the 2009 EU renewable energy directive; the estimated amount each percentage point below this target is likely to cost the State in fines payable to the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23884/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding. While good progress has been made to date, with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) advising that 9.1% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2015 were met from renewable sources, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. The SEAI has recently estimated that Ireland could fall short of our renewable energy target by between 1-3%. Moreover, in a document entitled *Ireland's Energy Targets – Progress, Ambition and Impacts* (published in April 2016), the SEAI estimated that the cost to Ireland of not meeting our overall renewable energy targets may be in the range of €65 million to €130 million for each percentage point Ireland falls short of the overall 16% renewable energy target.

The Renewable Energy Directive provides a comprehensive framework for Member States to work towards achieving individual and EU renewable energy targets including mechanisms for countries to work together such as statistical transfers, which allow Member States to meet their targets by purchasing credits from Member States that overachieve on their renewable targets.

The focus remains firmly on meeting our 2020 target and a number of interventions have been taken to support renewable energy, including the Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff supports. New measures are also in development including a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme and a Renewable Heat Incentive. In any event the cost of purchasing statistical transfers should any potential shortfall in Ireland's target arise has yet to be established and will depend on a number of factors, particularly available supply and market costs.

Question No. 282 answered with Question No. 273.

Rail Services Provision

283. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he has taken to secure funding for the expansion of DART services to west Dublin, in particular the electrification of the section of the Dublin to Sligo line as far as Maynooth. [23900/17]

297. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the electrification of the Maynooth line to facilitate DART services to west Dublin and north Kildare. [23899/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 297 together.

I refer the Deputy to my response to Dáil Question No. 541 which I answered on Tuesday, 16 May 2017. The position remains as outlined in that response.

Road Tolls

284. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which moneys collected from toll roads are paid to the Exchequer by amount and road tolled in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23588/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to national roads. More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII.

Noting the above position, I have referred the matter to TII for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Legal Costs

285. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount incurred in legal fees and associated costs (details supplied) to date in 2017 regarding the Commercial Court action on tendering for the M50 toll; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23592/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to national roads. More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII.

Noting the above position, I have referred the matter to TII for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

286. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress being made towards the development of the Macroom bypass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23593/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the

national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Brexit Issues

287. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with management of CIE or the manager of Rosslare Europort for the purposes of discussing Britain's exit from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23624/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While I have not met with CIÉ and the manager of Rosslare Europort specifically in relation to Brexit, I have had a series of meetings with the management of CIE and all three of its subsidiaries, where Brexit issues arose, as appropriate. As the Deputy is also aware, I hosted an All Island Transport Sectorial Meeting on Brexit in Dundalk on 23rd January which fed into the Brexit All Island Civic dialogue on 17th February to discuss the many possible implications of Brexit across all sectors. Rosslare Europort was represented at this forum. To the best of my knowledge, the manager of Rosslare Europort has not requested a meeting to date, however, should he wish to meet, I would be happy to do so.

In addition to the above, last month my Department held a Workshop on the impact of Brexit on maritime transport, regulation and on the sectors on which this impacts. Stakeholders, including Rosslare Europort, were invited from organisations across the broader maritime sector, such as merchant shipping, national shipping, fishing vessels, recreational craft, ports, equipment suppliers, service providers and training providers.

My Department is planning to conduct a study/ research into the use of the UK Landbridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of the research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Landbridge currently, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Landbridge usage and the various options that may be viable. The results of the study are awaited.

As one of our key RoRo ports, the impact of Brexit on the use of the UK landbridge is of obvious significant importance to Rosslare, all the more so given its advantageous location in terms of potential direct shipping to Continental Europe.

The Department of An Taoiseach has indicated an intention to hold a further All-Island Dialogue in July and has asked that Departments consider further Sectorial dialogues and I and my Department continue to engage in this process to facilitate engagement with representatives across all sectors who wish to participate.

Roads Maintenance Funding

288. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the repair of roads in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23637/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Roads Maintenance Funding

289. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for a new bridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23647/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Sport Ireland Funding

290. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding insurance for motorsport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23648/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In relation to the matter outlined in details supplied, support for sport is a matter for Sport Ireland. Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. Sport Ireland channels funding for sport through the relevant National Governing Body of Sport, in this case, Motor Sport Ireland. The National Governing Bodies may use this funding assistance to offset the costs associated with staging events and to moderate participation fees.

As this is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the Deputy's questions to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Aviation Industry

291. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ad-

dress a matter (details supplied) regarding noise management at Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23709/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am unaware of any discussions daa have had with the IAA in relation to the noise management regime at Dublin Airport. While I have indicated that IAA will be appointed as the competent authority in relation to EU Directive 598/2014, this has yet to be provided for in a Statutory Instrument which I hope to have finalised shortly.

In relation to the Deputy's reference to a collaborative working group, I wish to refer the Deputy to my response to Question 22102/17 of 10th May.

Traffic Calming Measures

292. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a speed limit review undertaken in 2016 allowing local authorities request speed limit changes on local and regional roads in their own areas with particular regard to County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23836/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): At the time of the issuing of the Department's updated *Guidelines for Setting and Managing Speed Limits in Ireland* in March 2015, which is available on the Department's website at www.dttas.ie, local authorities were requested to review and update all speed limits in their administrative areas in accordance with the Guidelines. In the case of national roads this review was to be undertaken in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). The Guidelines reiterate that the making of Special Speed Limit bye-laws is a matter for the elected members of local authorities, subject to following Departmental Guidelines and to the consent of TII in the case of national roads.

It should be noted that as part of the review of speed limits on national roads, TII has assessed the widths of all national roads and is currently engaged in the process of providing this information to local authorities. This will assist local authorities in the task of identifying the appropriate speed limits for different sections of national roads within their respective administrative areas in accordance with the Department's Guidelines.

Local authorities have been requested to complete the overall speed limit review exercise, including the implementing of bye-laws where necessary, by Quarter 2 of 2017.

My Department will review the progress of local authorities on the speed limit review, including Kildare County Council, after the end of June 2017.

Bus Éireann Services

293. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Derry to Dublin Bus Éireann route; his plans to ensure that this route remains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23837/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Dail Question No. 646 which I answered on Tuesday, 9th May 2017, copy attached below.

The Dublin to Derry route is a commercial licensed bus service operated by Expressway. As with any such commercial service, decisions regarding the route are a matter for the individual

operator. These services receive no taxpayer funding and operate on a fully commercial basis.

As I have stated on numerous occasions, in cases where a commercial operator, such as Expressway, decides to alter or withdraw a commercial route, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has the statutory powers available to it to respond as appropriate to ensure continued transport connectivity.

The NTA published an assessment of the proposed changes on the Dublin to Derry Bus Éireann Expressway route (Route 33) and as indicated in that published assessment, the NTA does not believe that connectivity issues arise on the route 33 corridor. The majority of the corridor will continue to be served by Expressway's route 32 (Dublin to Letterkenny) while Dublin to Derry itself will continue to be served by two Translink operated services - the X3 and the X4.

In publishing its assessment the NTA invited feedback on its proposals. A copy of the assessment is available on www.nationaltransport.ie.

Newspaper Articles

294. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details on a specific matter (details supplied) in tabular form. [23849/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have written the following articles since officially taking office;

May 8 2016- Finally face to face with those who suffered my most fierce criticism

May 15 2016- First week in the asylum: I lost my licence, not my drive

May 22 2016- The sky hasn't fallen in yet but better cool my jets

June 19 2016- Veronica may now be a saint, but she was no angel

July 3 2016- In five years' time we will wonder just what all the fuss was about

November 20 2016- A successful Irish Rugby World Cup bid will lift us all

March 5 2017- Three pints must mean more than three points.

I have received no payment for any articles written since taking up office on the 6th of May 2016.

Dublin Bus Services

295. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected increase in bus passengers in Dublin for each of the next five years in view of a growth in population and increasing economic activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23895/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is probably aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) maintains a number of regional transport models to support its transport planning remit. The models are strategic multi-modal, network based transport models and include all the main surface modes of travel (including travel by car, bus, rail, Luas, heavy goods vehicles, walking and cycling).

As the issue raised is a matter for the NTA, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to it for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Park and Ride Facilities

296. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the location of the bus based park and ride facilities he is considering and has submitted as part of the mid term capital review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23896/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 includes the planned development of a network of strategic rail-based park and ride facilities where rail services intersect with the national road network. In addition, at the end of May, the NTA will launch an important new initiative proposing a radical transformation of the bus system in the GDA that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of 'next generation' bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations.

I am seeking additional funding for public transport investment in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support these initiatives. The extent to which the bus based park and ride network will be rolled out and the locations of the sites will be dependent on the level of additional funding that may become available for public transport following the completion of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

Question No. 297 answered with Question No. 283.

Company Registration

298. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of the establishment and dissolution of companies in each of the past ten years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23642/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies Registration Office (CRO) is the statutory authority for registering new companies in Ireland and is the central repository of public statutory information on Irish companies.

Statistics on the incorporation and dissolution of companies are published in the Annual Reports produced by the Companies Registration Office, which may be accessed for free on the website www.cro.ie.

Details of the number of companies incorporated and dissolved in the years 2005 to 2016 are set out in the table.

Year	Incorporations	Dissolutions
2005	17,206	14,643
2006	19,190	10,140
2007	18,704	9,333
2008	14,723	11,650
2009	13,321	12,513

Year	Incorporations	Dissolutions
2010	14,013	13,399
2011	14,615	15,023
2012	14,009	14,839
2013	15,506	13,583
2014	17,782	13,008
2015	19,404	9,128
2016	20,951	15,221

Enterprise Support Services Provision

299. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding grants for a play centre for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23671/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business.

In the first instance, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office, Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories, i.e., Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea) Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up) and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. It should be noted that the LEOs do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs offer 'soft' support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course) or provide a mentor to work with the business proposer.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to MicroFinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks.

Contact details for each LEO can be accessed at <https://www.localenterprise.ie/>.

I should also draw your attention to the 'Supporting SMEs' Online Tool, which is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible. The tool is available at <https://www.supportingsmes.ie/BusinessDetails.aspx>.

By answering the eight questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location, be able to:

- find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Govern-

ment Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them;

- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further;
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

Health and Safety

300. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if British construction certificates are recognised by the HSA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23685/17]

301. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if Lantra accredited tickets granted in the UK are recognised by the HSA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23686/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 301 together.

This Government is fully committed to promoting and delivering on safe and healthy workplaces.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the national statutory body under the aegis of my Department with responsibility for enforcing occupational safety and health law, promoting and encouraging accident prevention, and providing information and advice to all companies, organisations and individuals.

However, the responsibility for recognition of qualifications is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills and in particular SOLAS, the national further education and training authority.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 (S.I. 291 of 2013) requires anybody engaged in certain tasks to be in possession of a valid Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card for the activity. Only a SOLAS CSCS card meets this requirement of the Regulations.

The Construction Regulations allow for a person to get the CSCS card in a number of ways.

- A worker can successfully complete the training/assessment and attain a QQI certificate and get a CSCS card.

- Alternatively the Regulations allow for SOLAS to recognise other awards from other EU Member States as equivalent to the QQI award and to issue a CSCS card on this basis.

- An application can also be made to SOLAS for recognition of other jurisdiction training under the European Union (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 2017 (S.I. 8 of 2017).

Anybody with a British construction certificate, LANTRA or any other qualification, will need to contact SOLAS directly in order to enquire about recognition of their award.

Economic Competitiveness

302. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 253 of 11 May 2017, the detail of Ireland's ranking overall when compared with small economies in the latest World Bank Doing Business rankings available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23824/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): At the time of developing Enterprise 2025, Ireland ranked 13th overall in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings and 7th when compared with small economies. Enterprise 2025 lists the comparator small countries with higher rankings.

In its latest publication, Doing Business 2017 which was released in October 2016, the World Bank ranked Ireland 18th overall and 9th when compared with small economies. The comparator small countries with higher rankings were as follows - New Zealand (1st), Singapore (2nd), Denmark (3rd), Hong Kong (4th), Norway (6th), Estonia (12th), Finland (13th), Latvia (14th) and Ireland (18th).

Economic and Social Research Institute

303. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on recent ESRI reports (details supplied) and the data showing that the vast majority of export earnings in 2015 were generated by foreign companies. [23827/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The evidence provided by the report, Expanding and diversifying the manufactured exports of Irish-owned enterprises April 4, 2017, undertaken by the ESRI on behalf of my Department and Enterprise Ireland, highlights the balance of exports between multinational corporations and indigenous enterprises. This research on manufacturing exports examines how firms launch, adapt, diversify and grow their exports and provides insights into the opportunities, risks and challenges of operating in the global marketplace.

It shows that exporting is highly concentrated in a relatively small percentage of firms and that most exporters sell a small number of products to few markets. 11% of highly globalised Irish-owned firms (exporting more than 20 products to over 20 destinations) account for 46% of total exports. The picture for foreign-owned firms shows that the 40% of firms with over 20 products to more than 20 markets accounted for almost 80% of export volumes.

The value of exports is dominated by a relatively small group of exporters. Whilst the largest proportions of exporting firms are Irish-owned and small and medium-sized, the most export value is accounted for by large, foreign-owned firms.

Many of the key features of Ireland's export behaviour and export performance identified in this research are also present in other small open economies. For example, exports in Belgium are concentrated amongst large and most productive firms; in Denmark, largest exporters have the highest share of total exports; in Hungary foreign ownership is important in export patterns; and in Luxembourg 10% of exporters account for 91% of export value.

Notwithstanding Ireland's unique position with respect to different export behaviour by indigenous and foreign-owned firms, this research shows the similarities Ireland shares with such countries.

Departmental Schemes

304. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will ensure the continuation of the counselling grants scheme for schools (details supplied) in view of the fact the withdrawal of this funding would be a regressive step; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23594/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 1994 the Department of Social Welfare opened a grant scheme to provide counselling supports to children who had experienced bereavement or loss. This grant scheme then passed to the Family Support Agency (FSA) when it was established in 2003 and subsequently to Tusla on establishment in January 2014.

Up until 2011 applications were invited through an annual public advertisement, however in 2011 due to austerity, this scheme was closed and no new applications have been accepted. Since 2011 the grantees who received funding in 2011 have continued to receive an annual grant equivalent to their 2011 grant. This Counselling Grants Scheme is for a total of €245,900 annually and currently there are only 64 grantees nationwide benefitting from this scheme. With over 4,000 schools in Ireland 64 grantees means that less than 2% of schools are in receipt of support from this scheme currently.

The Counselling Grants Scheme which was originally established to provide counselling support for children affected by bereavement or loss was affected by austerity cuts in 2010. The need for bereavement and loss counselling still exists in schools right around the country however without a significantly increased budget it is unfair and unethical to continue providing support to a small number of areas (64 grantees) while excluding all other schools from the scheme. Opening up the scheme nationally with a current budget allocation of €245,000 is not an option as this equates to less than €60 per school. Hence the decision was made to cease the scheme in its current format.

Tusla Educational Welfare Services is very supportive of the provision of appropriate school counselling supports and the option of continuing the scheme with adequate funding to provide the opportunity to all schools and School Completion Programmes nationally. All School Completion Programmes have been requested to identify unmet needs as part of their annual plan for 2017/18. Responses identifying gaps in service, including counselling provision for bereavement and loss, are currently being reviewed by Tusla Educational Welfare Service and a report will be forwarded to my Department when this process is complete.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

305. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that will benefit from the second ECCE year in 2017; the number that have benefited from it in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23614/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Entry to the ECCE programme is based on a programme year that runs between September and August, so for the purpose of this PQ we propose to answer your query based on 2016 - 2017 and then 2017- 2018 programme years.

To date, approximately 14,000 children have registered for both 2015 - 2016 and 2016 - 2017 cycles and based on current registrations we would estimate that a similar number of children will register for both 2016 - 2017 and 2017-2018. A full year's registration won't be

known until the Summer when the the programme closes for that cycle. The rate of uptake of the second year is dependent on a number of external factors including parental choice with regard to school starting age.

Early Childhood Care and Education

306. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that applied for an assessment for the access inclusion model; the average waiting time for an assessment; and the number of children qualifying for each level of support. [23615/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): AIM is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Its goal is to empower pre-school providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the pre-school setting.

Where a pre-school provider, in conjunction with a parent, considers that they may need some additional support in order to meet the needs of a child with a disability in an inclusive way, they can apply for a suite of more targeted supports.

As of the 15th May, there have been 2,372 applications for AIM Level 4 support, seeking expert advice and mentoring from AIM Early Years Specialists within the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service.

The current turnaround between the submission of AIM Access and Inclusion Profiles and decisions in relation to AIM Level 4 supports is 8 working days on average. Applications are first reviewed by an Early Years Specialist, who makes contact with the pre-school provider to request more detail and begin the review process. If the pre-school provider requires AIM Level 4 support, a visit, at a mutually agreed time, is arranged. Immediate phone support can also be provided where relevant.

A pre-school provider, in partnership with a parent, can apply for AIM Level 7, which is additional capitation to fund an extra person in the pre-school room or enable the reduction of the adult to child ratio where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE programme. The current turnaround between the submission of AIM Access and Inclusion Profiles and decisions for AIM Level 7 support is 50.5 working days on average. This would include some parents/ pre-school providers who submit an AIM Access and Inclusion Profile with the intention of receiving supports under another level of AIM and later going on to apply for AIM Level 7.

As of the 15th May, AIM has provided 2,160 children with varying degrees of support to ensure that they can fully participate in the ECCE programme:

- Under Level 4, (Expert Early Years Educational Advice and Support), 2,100 applications have been approved.

- Under Level 5 (Equipment and Minor Alterations), 199 applications for equipment and 29 applications for minor alterations have been approved.

- Under Level 7 (Additional Assistance in the Pre-school Room), 1,228 applications have

been approved.

Area Based Childhood Programme

307. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding that has been provided to the ABC schemes on an annual basis since 2011. [23616/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ABC Programme is a joint prevention and early intervention initiative, led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic). The ABC Programme commenced in 2013 and was designed as a time-bound, co-funding agreement in the amount of €29.7m to 2017. In late 2016, my Department secured additional funding to ensure that all 13 existing ABC sites are to remain in contract to the end of December 2017. Addendums to contracts are currently being issued to sites to facilitate these extensions.

The aim of the ABC Programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families in 13 areas of disadvantage. The focus of the work under the ABC Programme covers, in the main: Child Health & Development; Children's Learning; Parenting; and Integrated Service Delivery.

Below are the funding amounts received by each ABC site from 2013 to 2016 inclusive, alongside the total allocations for the period 2013 to 2017 under the ABC Programme.

	Total Allocation 2013-2017 (ABC)	2013	2014	2015	2016
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Ballyfermot - Family Matters	0.75	-	-	0.19	0.41
Ballymun - YoungBallymun	5.5	0.50	1.75	1.75	1.20
Young Knocknaheeny	1.8	-	-	0.45	0.63
Bray SPECS	0.84	-	-	0.21	0.29
Clondalkin Blueskies Initiative	1.13	-	0.27	0.38	0.25
Dublin Docklands NCI	1.2	-	0.12	0.18	0.66
Northside PFL (Incl. Midlands)	3.74	0.30	1.20	0.50	0.77
Better Finglas	1.21	-	-	0.55	0.42

Louth - The Genesis Programme	1.51	-	0.15	0.76	0.45
Limerick ABC Start "Right"	1.58	-	-	0.39	0.55
CDI Tallaght	4.63	0.41	1.42	1.42	0.41
DIT Grange-gorman ABC	0.94	-	-	0.24	0.33
	24.83	1.21	4.91	7.02	6.37

The ABC Programme was preceded by the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007-2013) in which three sites participated: Youngballymun, CDI Tallaght, and the Preparing for Life Programme. Total funding for the PEIP amounted to €36 million.

It is the intention of my Department to seek additional funding in this year's estimates process, to extend the ABC Programme to the end of August 2018. This extension brings the existing programme closer in line with the expected timeline for delivery of the national evaluation report in 2018.

My Department is working to ensure that we take full account of the learning from all the interventions across the 13 ABC sites, and the national evaluation. We will utilise this learning to inform the delivery of prevention and early intervention initiatives in order to achieve our goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout Ireland.

Child and Family Agency Staff

308. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons employed as staff in the child and family social work department in the Tusla office in Dundalk; and if she will provide a breakdown of those staff members' roles and qualifications in the specific area of child and family protection. [23681/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise that this is an operational matter for Tusla and my officials have requested that they reply directly to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Data

309. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases which have been received by the child and family social work department in the Tusla office in Dundalk between May 2016 and May 2017; and the length of time that passed between each case being received and contact being made with each family or person. [23682/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Information on the number of referrals received by child and family social work services is not collated by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in the format requested by the Deputy. The latest referral figures published by Tusla are for each administrative area, and indicate that a total of 2,509 referrals had been received in the Louth/Meath area in the first three quarters of 2016.

When a referral is received, the first step is to conduct a preliminary enquiry, to substantiate the details provided by the reporter. Preliminary enquiries should normally be completed

within 24 hours, and 100% were completed within this time frame in the Louth/Meath area.

For the Deputy's information, I would note that at the end of February 2017 there were 1,444 open cases in the Louth/Meath area. 274 were awaiting allocation, and 5 of these were high priority.

I only have national figures for the cases awaiting allocation, but I will ask Tusla to provide you with the waiting time for high priority cases for the Louth/Meath area.

Youth Services Funding

310. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the discrepancy in the guidelines for the 2017 youth grant scheme (details supplied ; if she will ensure that the recent changes to the 2017 criteria are changed back to the 2016 scheme criteria, including that 75% of the club or group members must be under 21 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23708/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

After a period of consultation with key stakeholders it was agreed that in line with the National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 it would be a condition of the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme that at least 75% of the club/group membership should be between the ages of 10 and 21. The clarification will ensure that the Scheme will have the maximum impact on the targeted cohort, as identified in the National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2020.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to some 1,600 youth groups and clubs, with an estimated 89,000 club members around the country. The scheme, which is open to new entrants, is advertised locally and applications for funding are invited by the Education and Training Boards from local groups in their respective areas. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. In 2016, €1.065m was allocated to this scheme. In 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

311. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing financial difficulties for community childcare services in areas of disadvantage due to the unique nature of the children and families they serve and the additional needs they have; the action she is taking to ensure that community childcare settings in areas of disadvantage are supported by a sustainable funding system; if she will consider the

granting of a separate funding stream for providers in designated areas of disadvantage as exists under the DEIS scheme in respect of schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23710/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Community childcare facilities are important partners in the delivery of affordable, accessible, high quality childcare. The majority of community childcare services are operating well and have been able to manage issues they face within the structures available, including by availing of support from County and City Childcare Committees, Pobal and my Department. Nevertheless, I have implemented a number of substantial measures in the past year to assist these services.

Most recently, I announced a substantial increase and expansion of the Community Childcare Subvention programme from September 2017, which will provide significant additional funding to families but also to services. In addition, Strand Two of the 2017 Early Years Capital programme, which closed for application on May 5th, made €500,000 available in grants of up to €20,000 to Community services who are seeking to make building improvements or undertake maintenance or refurbishment. These applications are currently being assessed, and I anticipate recommendations on funding in the coming weeks.

I have also taken steps to provide payment to community services for ‘non-contact time’ for the first time, and this will be available in summer 2017. A total of €14.5 million is available across community and private services.

The Deputy will be aware of the challenges faced by a small number of community services who have been facilitating the training of Community Employment participants. I made €1m in funding available to services that identified themselves as having difficulties in this regard. The funding will ensure that regulatory changes do not hinder service delivery or the availability of childcare places. I will also be considering how this funding can best be deployed in 2018 to address the most urgent challenges facing childcare services.

In the longer term, the Independent Review of the Cost of Quality Childcare, which will be commissioned later this year, will include consideration of factors that affect the financial viability of the childcare sector. The review is likely to examine issues such as the total average cost of provision; costs and revenues for services operating in disadvantaged communities; and sustainability issues. The review will inform future policy development and the Estimates process.

My priority is to ensure we provide access to high quality and affordable childcare. I am committed to doing all I can to continue to attract the necessary investment to deliver on this objective.

Youth Services

312. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that youth services in Cabra have been directed by the Department of Education and Skills of revised pay scales for youth workers as part of the Haddington Road pay restoration deal and consequently increased funding allocated must be used in the first instance to increase youth workers’ pay and will not be used to increase services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23732/17]

313. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the directive on revised pay scales for Cabra youth services or others was issued after programmes and agreements were devised with staff; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this has

put further strain on the voluntary boards of management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23733/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

This year, I approved a 5% increase in funding to each of the targeted youth services operating across the country.

With the exception of a small number of services staffed by Education and Training Board employees, staff employed in youth projects and services funded by my Department, are not public servants. City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) acts as my Department's funding intermediary in the administration of targeted youth funding to youth services in Dublin City, including those in Cabra. I am advised that a number of youth workers, employed in projects administered by CDYSB, are on scales linked to public pay scales. It has been brought to my attention that Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 0027/2017 may apply to these individuals.

In this regard, I am further advised that the costs associated with the implementation of this Circular is considerably less than the 5% increase in allocation that each of these services received this year.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

314. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if consideration is being given to the requests of an association (details supplied); the proposals there are to enable Defence Forces personnel to have access to the State's industrial relations agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23767/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In relation to the right to trade union status for the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, I wish to advise that under the terms of the Defence (Amendment) Act, 1990 the Defence Forces Representative Associations are prohibited from being associated with, or affiliated to any trade unions, or any other body. Accordingly, the Representative Associations cannot be affiliated to ICTU at present. The basis for the prohibition is that it would be inappropriate to apply the provisions of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 to members of the Defence Forces. The taking of any form of industrial action is irreconcilable with military service. This is a long standing policy position taken by respective Governments since the foundation of the State. The Defence Forces may be called on to contribute to maintaining vital services in times of industrial action. The potential for serious difficulties and conflicts could arise in these circumstances if the Defence Forces Representative Associations were associated with, or affiliated to ICTU,

given ICTU rules in relation to such matters. The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF Representative Associations, RACO and PDFORRA, to engage with the Official side. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a means for the determination of claims and proposals from the Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service. It is open to the Representative Associations to submit claims to the Official side in relation to matters falling within the C&A scheme. Generally claims relate to pay and conditions, award of allowances etc. When submitted, these claims are generally the subject of negotiations and where agreement is not reached it is open to both sides to seek the assistance of an adjudicator to settle the matter. In addition, a framework exists which facilitates the Associations engaging with the official side in talks parallel to those taking place between ICTU and the official side at National level.

I have received representations from PDFORRA seeking to have access to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court made available to them in the event of any future legislative changes being made to provide An Garda Síochána with access to same. I am advised that the proposals in relation to An Garda Síochána being granted such access will require detailed legislative changes and the Department of Justice and Equality have established a Working Group to examine in detail what future legislative changes are required.

I remain satisfied with the present arrangements in place for the Defence Forces. However, in the light of PDFORRA's representations the matter is being kept under review, including in the context of any future arrangements to be made for An Garda Síochána.

In relation to wage restoration it should be noted that rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in the Irish Defence Force have traditionally been set by reference to relative levels of pay across the various parts of the Irish public sector. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2013 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (the Lansdowne Road Agreement) define current pay policy for Public Servants and members of the Permanent Defence Forces. I believe that measures contained in the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA), which PDFORRA have recently signed up to, and the provisions introduced in Budget 2016 and 2017 will be of benefit generally to members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF).

The LRA proposes to increase salaries during 2016 and 2017. 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 Financial Emergency Measures in Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2013. As you may be aware PDFORRA, the representative association for enlisted personnel of the Permanent Defence Force, have recently accepted the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and the above pay provisions will now also apply to their members. Currently my officials are engaged in arranging the payment of these pay increases.

In relation to the Pensions Related Deduction (PRD), which is commonly referred to as the 'Pension Levy', the exemption threshold for payment of the 'Pension 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.

With regard to the post 1994 soldier, Military life places unique demands on individuals and it is necessary that its members be physically and mentally prepared to meet the challenges of all military operations and to undertake their duties on deployment overseas. To this end, it is vital the age and health profile of personnel be such as to ensure that operational capability and effectiveness are not compromised in any way

In regard to the use of Lariam in the Defence Forces, it is the policy of the Defence Forces that personnel are individually screened for fitness for overseas service and medical suitability, i.e. a medical risk assessment for Lariam is carried out on an individual basis. The choice of medication for overseas deployment, is a medical decision made by the Medical Officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member.

Significant precautions are taken by the Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of the Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications, including identification of any contraindications and assessment of any reported side effects that may occur. While overseas, all personnel have access to either an Irish military Medical Officer or to the UN provided medical service (depending on the particular mission) to whom they could report any complaints, including potential side effects of any medications.

There are no plans at this time to withdraw Lariam from the range of anti-malarial medications available to the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Expenditure

315. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the Defence Forces budget and expenditure on information technology in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23780/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces budget and expenditure on information technology in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 is outlined in the table below .

	Budget	Exp	Budget	Exp	Budget	Exp	Budget	Exp	Budget	Exp	Budget	Exp End April
	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Total	6,250	6,419	6,330	7,022	6,340	7,623	7,140	10,810	10,130	11,098	9,933	4,534

Defence Forces Expenditure

316. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the Defence Forces budget and expenditure on cybersecurity in each of the years 2012 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [23781/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As outlined in the Governments White Paper on Defence 2015, Cyber attacks have very significant implications for governmental administration, for industry, for economic well-being and for the security and safety of citizens. The response to cyber threats remains a whole-of-Government challenge, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment having the lead role. The primary focus of the Defence Forces is the protection of Defence networks, for which there is a resource commitment. The Defence Forces have two personnel seconded to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment's Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT-IE) on an ongoing basis. A Service Level Agreement is currently being developed in relation to such supports to CSIRT.

For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to divulge details of the Defence Forces resource commitments to cyber security, which involve a combination of personnel, equipment

and ICT resourcing.

Defence Forces Personnel

317. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel assigned to cybersecurity in each of the years 2012 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and the ranks of each in each year. [23782/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For security and operational reasons it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific cyber capabilities of the Defence Forces.

Air Corps

318. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if, when an Air Corps CASA aircraft was refused entry into Swedish airspace, this was due to the fact the submitted paperwork completed by his Department failed to meet the necessary requirements of the Swedish authorities; if he will provide the requirements that must be met when filing paperwork for an Air Corps plane to enter foreign airspace; and the reason on this occasion those requirements were not met. [23788/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Air Corps operates two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, which are unarmed aircraft and primarily used for sea fisheries protection and maritime patrolling. They are also on occasion tasked with providing support such as military transport to the wider Defence Forces. It is a condition of diplomatic clearance that the Air Corps pass details, via the Department of Defence, of each proposed flight, i.e., date, timing, etc. to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who forward the request for permission to the relevant country in question. When military goods are transported by Air Corps aircraft overseas, they are listed in the diplomatic clearance application of the destination country. This information is used so as to ensure that, in the event of an in-flight emergency, the rescue and recovery services are alerted to the presence of said goods.

The Deputy will appreciate that the laws, practices and procedures in this area differ from country to country and that timelines for processing of applications can also vary, depending on the type of aircraft, the nature of the cargo and whether the aircraft in question proposes to land in or to overfly the country in question.

I can assure the Deputy that the usual procedure in obtaining diplomatic clearance for the Air Corps to fly was followed by the Department of Defence. However, there were delays in securing this clearance. For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to get into the specific details.

I also wish to assure the Deputy that we fully respect the laws, practices and procedures of other countries with respect to the control of military aircraft in their airspace. Similarly we expect other countries to respect our laws, practices and procedures with respect to the control of foreign military aircraft in our airspace.