

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 9 to 24, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 25 to 37, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Modern Language Teaching

38. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the modern languages strategy; and his further views on whether the reform of the teaching of modern languages is not being given enough priority in education policy and that his Department has no strategy for improving language skills, particularly at primary level. [24664/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The publication of an ambitious ten-year Foreign Language Strategy is a key commitment in my Department's Action Plan for Education and is a priority issue for me. The Strategy will include the following goals:

- Introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a Leaving Certificate curricular subject. Together with other measures, this will mean that all of our main target languages in our export strategies will now be provided as curricular Leaving Certificate subjects

- Double the number of schools offering more than two foreign languages as part of Transition Year programmes

- Measures to develop and build on the heritage language skills of immigrant communities: these include curricular specifications at Leaving Certificate, starting with Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese, as heritage languages, with accompanying Leaving Certificate examinations. These specifications would replace the existing Leaving Certificate non-curricular examinations in these languages.

- Consideration of the development of additional Junior Cycle Short Courses for heritage languages, mindful of the fact that a short course in Polish already exists.

- The Department will work with embassies of relevant countries in delivering on these commitments.

- Exploring the possibilities of using CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) techniques by teaching aspects of the primary curriculum through Irish and foreign languages which will equip learners with transferrable language skills.

I am committed to developing a benchmark standard against which our performance in languages at all levels can be measured. This will enable us to benchmark our linguistic competence against ourselves and in comparison with other countries. This will also facilitate objective target-setting for performance in languages. To this end, we will mainstream use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

39. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on ending the different pay rates for teachers; if he will report on discussions with the teachers' unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24653/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours.

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

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the recently published analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government established the Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of public service pay talks. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation and these discussions are now underway.

### **State Examinations**

40. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the selection of candidates for superintending State exams; and his views on whether an opportunity is being missed to employ more unemployed, part-time or temporary teachers in these roles. [24657/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission (SEC) has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. They have provided me with the following information.

Examination superintendents are appointed annually by the SEC. Appointment in one year does not necessarily guarantee appointment in any subsequent year. The positions are advertised:

- in the national newspapers;
- by issuing the previous year's superintendents with an application form;
- by supplying application forms to all post-primary schools.

To be eligible for appointment, applicants must satisfy all of the terms and conditions for appointment set out by the SEC. Since 2013, this includes a requirement to be registered on the Register of Teachers maintained by the Teaching Council of Ireland, a change that was linked to requirements under the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012.

The SEC has a long-standing policy of prioritising applications from non-permanent teachers in the appointment of superintendents. Retired teachers may also apply and be appointed in accordance with the terms of the Employment Equality Act, 1998, which prohibits discrimination in employment on a number of grounds, including age. The SEC emphasises its policy of prioritising applications from substitute or unemployed teachers in the recruitment section on its website and in recruitment information sent to schools for distribution to teachers. To give effect to this policy the SEC appoints all unemployed and substitute teachers, who apply for the role of Superintendent, before any other appointments are made to this role provided they are otherwise eligible.

### **Teacher Secondment**

41. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondments which have exceeded five years in the period July 2009 to October 2014, inclusive; the length of time for which five years was exceeded; the number of secondments refused or terminated in this same period on the grounds that the secondment exceeded five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24457/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The teacher secondment scheme is designed to facilitate the temporary assignment of a teacher to a vacant position in a host organisation, where the work to be carried out by the seconded teacher is of clear benefit to the education system.

A secondment must be based on mutual agreement between the teacher, the school authority and the host organisation and is subject to approval by my Department. When considering secondment applications schools are requested to consider national/ education objectives and policies and to facilitate, where possible, the release of teachers to national programmes for the benefit of the wider school community.

Information abstracted from a manual database indicates that seventy three primary teachers were on secondments in excess of five years in the period 2009 to 2014. The numbers in Voluntary secondary and community/ comprehensive schools on secondments in excess of five years in the same period was one hundred and eighty five. Information on secondments in E.T.Bs is not available in my Department. The other information requested involves the examination of

the hundreds of personal records and it has not been possible to dedicate the time required to undertake this task to date.

In 2010 a new limit on secondment numbers for teacher CPD support services and for positions in management and other bodies or working on programmes run by the Department was introduced. It is a condition of the revised arrangements that the maximum length of time that any teacher may be on secondment is set at 5 years, following which they may return to their schools.

The rationale for the revised policy on secondments is the need to ensure that only persons with recent knowledge and experience of teaching and learning and curriculum are involved in the design and delivery of professional development programmes for teachers.

While some difficulty was experienced implementing the new requirements particularly in relation to those who were on secondment prior to the new requirements being introduced in 2010, the 5 year limit has been implemented with some strictly limited alleviation agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for the Education Centres and support services to facilitate succession planning at local and national levels.

Draft proposals to amend the length of secondment arrangements to Department approved programmes are currently being considered under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council.

The Teacher Conciliation Council is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for Teachers and was set up to deal with claims and proposals relating to the Terms and Conditions of employment of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

Once finalised it is planned to publish the new revised secondment scheme.

## **Language Schools**

42. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the legislative proposals his Department has to establish a learner protection fund for students of English language schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24660/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I published the General Scheme of a Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill on 15th May 2017, following approval by Government.

The General Scheme provides for the protection of enrolled learners through the establishment of a Learner Protection Fund.

This Learner Protection Fund will provide the type of learner protection that was initially envisaged in 2012, when the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act was enacted.

The objective is to prioritise ‘academic bonding’ which will enable students to complete their programme of study in the event that their provider ceases to deliver the programme, rather than ‘financial bonding’.

Financial bonding provides for the refund of fees to students in the event of a programme ceasing to be delivered. While the recovery of fees is beneficial to students, the more important

priority is to support learners to complete their academic programme.

It is the intention that all providers of education and training engaging with the National Framework of Qualifications, with the exception of public bodies, will pay an annual charge to the Learner Protection Fund. The Fund will be managed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland and will be used to support students to complete their studies in the event of a programme being terminated by a provider before completion.

The proposal to introduce the Learner Protection Fund has been generally welcomed by education and training providers.

The General Scheme of the Bill will now be submitted to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

### **Asylum Support Services**

43. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria for qualifying for the pilot grant scheme for asylum seekers to attend university introduced by the Government in 2015; the status of its implementation; the number of applicants and the number of successful applicants according to place of residence in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24385/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Pilot Support Scheme was introduced by my Department in 2015 for students who are in the Protection System or at the Leave to Remain (but not deportation order) stage. This was one of the recommendations contained in the report by the Working Group on the Protection Process which was chaired by former High Court judge Dr Bryan McMahon.

The scheme provides supports to qualifying students which are similar to those available in the statutory based Student Grant Scheme.

Following a review of the Pilot Support Scheme 2015, I announced my decision to continue the scheme for the 2016/17 academic year and to undertake a further review in 2017. I expect the current review to be completed in the coming weeks before making an announcement on its future.

To qualify for the pilot scheme, prospective students have to meet a number of criteria, including a requirement to:

- Meet the definition of a protection applicant or a person at leave to remain stage (other than those at the deportation order stage);
- Obtained their Leaving Certificate;
- Have been accepted on an approved Post Leaving Certificate course or an approved undergraduate course;
- Have attended a minimum of five academic years in the Irish school system and have been part of an application for protection or leave to remain for a combined period of 5 years prior to the 31 August of the first year of their course.

### **School Transport Provision**

44. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that persons starting second level school are not deprived of a school transport service which is and was available to older siblings in circumstances in which a new method of calculating the distance from school has been introduced and is causing difficulties in many rural parts. [24674/17]

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

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

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

Under the terms of this Scheme in general children are eligible for transport where they meet the requisite distance and are attending their nearest school / education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Changes to the eligibility criteria for my Department's School Transport Scheme were announced in December 2010 by the then Government as part of measures contained in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations contained in the Value for Money review of the scheme.

The school transport approach complements the overall Department policy which is to ensure that specific school accommodation needs for defined geographical areas are addressed in an orderly fashion.

Children who had an eligibility for school transport prior to the introduction of these changes retain this eligibility for the duration of their post primary school education provided there is no change in their circumstances though siblings applying for transport from 2012 onwards are subject to the revised eligibility criteria.

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

### **School Transport Provision**

45. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will implement measures to alleviate the difficulties that arose for many persons prior to the commencement of the 2016/2017 school year, with particular reference to the availability of concessionary tickets on school transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24673/17]

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

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

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resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of this Scheme in general children are eligible for transport where they meet the requisite distance and are attending their nearest school / education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The school transport approach complements the overall Department policy which is to ensure that specific school accommodation needs for defined geographical areas are addressed in an orderly fashion.

The Programme for Government committed to a review of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme. This review which was published in December 2016 made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

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

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

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

46. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding commitments his Department has made to implement pillar 1 of Creative Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24464/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** ‘Creative Ireland’ is the Government’s legacy programme following on from the successful ‘Ireland 2016’ initiative. It is a five-year programme, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy. Devising an integrated implementation plan for Arts-in-Education is a priority under Pillar 1 of the programme, whose aim is to enable the creative potential of every child to be realised. This includes the objective that by 2022 every child in Ireland will have access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding. The plan – ‘Creative Children’ – is to be launched in September 2017.

Work on the ‘Creative Children’ plan is currently being progressed by my Department in close collaboration with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Arts Council. It is envisaged that the Creative Children plan will comprise three key strands. These connected strands will have overlapping concepts and themes. and it will be important to ensure there is co-operation and synergy across activities. This will ensure that the overarching goal of Pillar 1 can be achieved, providing successful experiences relating to arts, creativity and innovation, for our children and young people, and for our society as a whole.

It is proposed that these 3 strands will be:

1. Creative Schools / Scoileanna Ildánacha - which will see special teams of teachers and artists working together in schools to help make the arts a key part of school life.
2. Professional Development Strategies, for teachers and artists.

3. Further Arts Education Initiatives - under a plan that will encourage, highlight and recognise the non-formal and non-mainstream initiatives in arts education and creativity.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Arts Council in developing the plan for Pillar 1 of the programme. The overall Creative Ireland programme will shortly be considered by Government, following which the issue of programme funding will be progressed through the estimates and budgetary process.

### **School Curriculum**

47. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for religious education in the community national schools in view of the reports that 11 out of 13 of them are opting out of the Goodness Me, Goodness You programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24775/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Community National Schools are multi-denominational schools which provide for belief nurturing during the school day. There are eleven such schools in existence at present. They aim to accommodate parents who wish to have their children learn about different faiths and beliefs while at the same time nurturing children in their own beliefs.

‘Goodness Me, Goodness You’ (GMGY) is the patron’s programme that underpins the characteristic spirit of CNS schools. GMGY is a common programme suitable for pupils of all faiths and beliefs and none.

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

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

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

### **Schools Site Acquisitions**

48. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position



regarding securing a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; when a site is expected to be purchased; and the timeframe for works to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24466/17]

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

A preferred site option was identified and officials from Donegal County Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition. These negotiations have not yielded a positive result to date but are currently ongoing.

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

Officials from my Department have arranged to meet with officials from the relevant local authority to discuss the matter, with a view to determining the best means to expedite the site acquisition.

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

### **Schools Building Projects Applications**

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the financing of new school building at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24774/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not have any record of receiving an application for capital funding from the school to which he refers.

It is open to the school authority to submit an application to my Department and an application form may be accessed on my Department's website [www.education.gov.ie](http://www.education.gov.ie). Any application received will be considered in the context of the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic need and to accommodate additional teacher appointments.

### **Residential Institutions Redress Scheme**

50. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the oversight his Department currently has in place regarding the operations of Caranua in the absence of a sitting board which has not been in place since March 2017. [24469/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The term of office of the outgoing members of the Board of Caranua expired on 24 March last. A process to appoint members to the Board, which was managed on my behalf by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), is now nearing a conclusion and I will be making the necessary appointments in the

coming days. The outgoing Chairperson, Mr David O'Callaghan has been reappointed as a member of the Board and as Chairperson thus providing a degree of continuity and oversight. The functions assigned to me as Minister for Education and Skills under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 in relation to Caranua continue to be performed notwithstanding the fact that there are vacancies on the Board.

### **Schools Building Projects Administration**

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme is adequate over the next three years to meet the accommodation requirements at primary and second level in view of the need to bring classes sizes into line with best practice and ensure the availability of adequate mainstream special needs places in sufficient numbers to meet the demand and avoid delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24655/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

In addition, my Department is included among the prescribed bodies to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development and local area plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment and observations. This enables local authorities to reserve future school sites in areas designated for proposed housing development.

My Department's 6 Year Capital Programme prioritises building projects for areas where significant additional school places are required. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

Budget 2017 sets out the teaching resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools next year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demographic need, curriculum reform, additional guidance posts, additional resource teaching posts, additional teaching support for DEIS schools and the strengthening of school leadership.

My Department's policy is that children with special educational needs should be included in mainstream placements with additional supports provided, unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or in the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated. Some children may be supported in a special class attached to a mainstream school. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school. My Department, therefore, provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, (s)he will have access to an appropriate education. 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.

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. The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 181 Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year which will bring the total number of Special Classes available across the country to 1334.

### **School Admissions**

52. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the consultations regarding reform of school admissions. [24652/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy is referring to the consultation process that I have undertaken on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes.

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

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

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

The public consultation process accepted written submissions from 24th January to 20th March 2017.

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

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

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

### **Schools Building Projects**

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to develop a new national school to cater for the educational needs of the growing population of River Valley, Rathingle and Boroimhe, west Swords, County Dublin. [24470/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

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

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

My Department is also currently reviewing the demographic data for this area with regard to future needs. This review takes account of updated data from CSO, enrolment and child benefit data and also the impact of existing and planned capacity increases to schools in these areas.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

54. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on recent discussions with a project (details supplied) with regard to its new classrooms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24730/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The meeting to which the Deputy refers took place on the 18th of May last. It was a constructive meeting with the school undertaking to provide additional information for consideration by my Department. My Department will engage further with the school when this information has been received.

### **Technological Universities**

55. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the progress made on the development of a technical university for the south-east region since the TUSE project was initiated in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24671/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) project was initiated in 2011 and consists of a consortium of two Institutes of Technology; Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

The TUSE consortium made good progress initially and submitted a Stage 1 expression of interest in 2012. However, following this initial promising start, the consortium encountered a series of challenges and difficulties and did not succeed in finalising a Stage 2 Plan prior to the decision by WIT to suspend all merger activities in October 2014.

Following the publication of the Kelly report, a preliminary facilitation process which was recommended in the Report has been completed. There was strong engagement in the process

by both parties and this facilitation process has been an important building block in terms of building trust between the parties and in developing a strong working relationship between the Presidents and Chairs of both institutions. As part of this, the Presidents of the two institutions, have jointly developed an initial work-plan to support the development of a joint TU proposal.

In addition to this both Institutions made a joint presentation and submission to the Higher Education Authority (HEA), seeking funding to underpin the next phase of engagement. This was part of the latest call issued by the HEA regarding the restructuring of the higher education landscape. The call sought submissions for funding support in respect of the costs arising from mergers as part of the implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education.

Arising from the submissions received and subsequent detailed presentations made to the HEA, the TUSE project were allocated a ring-fenced sum of €1.445 Million in 2016 to support the further development of the project (€400,000 of this was provided to the consortium in November 2016 for 2017 work on the project).

The key merger objectives to be funded are:-

- A re-engagement plan, agreed by both Institutes.
- The publication of an agreed vision and values for a TUSE.
- Fostering a high level of staff and stakeholder engagement to help design the future TU.
- Developing a Regional Stakeholder Forum to underpin the potential of this new Institution to exert a transformational impact on the region by interacting very closely with stakeholders throughout its formative stages;
- External support to facilitate and support change management.

The Technological Universities Bill, which was published in December 2015, is to give effect to the recommendations set out in the National Strategy for Higher Education with regard to the IOT sector, including the development of a new technological university model. In addition, the Bill provides for a number of important reforms to the governance and operation of the existing institutes of technology.

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

When I became Minister for Education and Skills, I recognised that there were a significant number of matters raised previously in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage. A process of consultation has been underway with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government.

Following the finalisation of this consultation process I intend to advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised as part of this consultation process.

### **School Admissions**

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for a new forum on religious education in schools in view of 11 previous forums dealing with



this general issue and two public consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24773/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The current consultation process is specifically in relation to the role of denominational religion in the school admission process. I am the first Minister for Education to state that the system as it currently exists is unfair and the current consultation forum is the first consultation forum on this issue.

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

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

This is a highly complex and difficult issue. There are no easy solutions to this problem, with difficulties in areas including constitutional law, administration of the schools system and protection of minority religious groups.

However, doing nothing is not an option. While only 4% of our primary schools are under non-religious patronage, 10% of the population in the recent census stated that they are non-religious, with this figure even higher for those among usual parenting ages. One third of all marriages now take place outside of any religion.

The first step in this consultation process invited written submissions from the public, schools and interest groups between 24th January and 20th March 2017. The written consultation process attracted almost 1,000 responses from a combination of individuals, schools and stakeholder organisations.

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

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

If the Deputy is criticising the decision to consult with people who stand to be affected by any changes in this area, I strongly disagree with him. As mentioned this is the first such consultation, this is a highly complex and difficult issue and it is only right that we should consult in detail with the people who stand to be affected by change, prior to making decisions.

### **Special Educational Needs**

57. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to tackle the chronic shortage of post-primary autism spectrum disorder, ASD, special classes nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24672/17]

**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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1153 at present. The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 181 Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year which will bring the total number of Special Classes available across the country to 1334.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Oideachas Gaeltachta**

58. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cathain a bheidh an 30 Múinteoir Gaeltachta breise atá geallta sa Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 á n-earcú agus cén córas dáilte a bheidh i bhfeidhm chun na Múinteoirí breise sin a earcú sna Scoileanna Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [24724/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ag an leibhéal bunscoile, déanann an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 tagairt don soláthar áiteanna le haghaidh 30 múinteoir in aghaidh na bliana ó 2018/19 ar aghaidh i gcomhthéacs an chlár nua um oiliúint tosaigh múinteoirí trí mheán na Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí bunscoile. Tá an phleanáil ar siúl maidir leis an ngníomh seo agus tar éis comhairliúchán a dhéanamh leis na comhpháirtithe cuí, táthar ag súil go bhfoilseofar an glao ar thairiscintí leis an gclár a sholáthar sa Samhradh in 2017 agus táthar ag súil go mbeidh an dáta tosaigh don chlár ceithre bliana seo in 2018/19 nó 2019/20 má éiríonn go maith leis an nglao ar thairiscintí agus má léiríonn dóthain scoláirí féideartha spéis ann.

Ag an leibhéal iar-bhunscoile, tá dhá phost iar-bhunscoile ar iasacht faighte le déanaí ag Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh, an soláthraí reatha um oiliúint tosaigh múinteoirí iar-bhunscoile leis an soláthar múinteoirí a láidriú, a mhéadú agus a dhaingniú sa Mháistir Ghairmiúil Oideachais a mhaireann dhá bhliain ag an leibhéal iar-bhunscoile má léiríonn dóthain scoláirí féideartha spéis ann. Tá próiseas earcaíochta ar siúl faoi láthair don dá phost iar-bhunscoile ar iasacht.

At primary level, the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 makes reference to the provision of places for 30 teachers per year from 2018/19 in the context of a new Irish-medium

initial teacher-education programme for primary teachers. Planning is underway in relation to this action and following consultation with relevant parties, it is expected that the call for proposals for the provision of the programme will be published in Summer 2017 with an expected start date for this four-year programme in 2018/19 or 2019/20 pending a successful outcome to the call for proposals process and sufficient take-up by potential students.

At post-primary level, two post-primary seconded posts have recently been allocated to NUI, Galway, the existing post-primary initial teacher education provider in order to strengthen, increase and bolster the supply of teachers in the two-year Professional Masters of Education (PME) at post-primary level pending sufficient take-up by potential students. A recruitment process is currently underway for the two seconded post-primary posts.

### **Institutes of Technology Funding**

59. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the level of capital investment in institutes of technology is adequate; the progress being made to address the significant capital shortfall and infrastructure deficits which exist across the sector; and his views on best way in which to remedy these. [24665/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises the importance of the higher education sector to Ireland's future economic and social development. However, the reality of the economic situation and the public expenditure corrections which had to be made in recent years presented challenges across all areas of public expenditure, including higher education. The sector has responded well to these challenges and has continued to provide opportunities for increasing numbers of students to undertake a higher education qualification.

The Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education (Cassells Report) found that a capital programme of €5.5 billion is required over the next 15 years. This has informed the submission of my Department to the ongoing Capital Review process led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This submission was also informed by responses from Higher Education Institutions to a consultation process on capital requirements recently undertaken by the Higher Education Authority, with the support of my Department.

In the meantime, the Deputy will be aware that the 2016-2021 Capital Plan provides for a direct Exchequer investment of €150m in higher education, including €40m already allocated to the Grangegorman project. It also provides for €200m worth of PPP projects. These are hugely important and very welcome investments. An important focus of the funding will be on addressing infrastructural deficits that exist in the Institutes of Technology.

In 2016, my Department provided capital funding of almost €20m for Institutes of Technology, including a €10m provision for urgent minor works and equipment renewal.

The Department of Education and Skills and the Higher Education Authority are currently progressing the prioritisation of projects for the PPP programme.

### **Literacy Programmes**

60. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the reading recovery programme in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. [24012/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Reading Recovery is a

literacy initiative that was initially made available for DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 schools only as part of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which was launched in May 2005. Each of these schools was given an opportunity to have a teacher trained as a Reading Recovery teacher. In some areas where training took place in local cluster groups, schools other than those targeted in the DEIS Action Plan were allowed to participate in the programme.

My Department, through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), continues to prioritise this support for DEIS schools as well as maintaining ongoing support for other schools already participating in the Reading Recovery programme.

New non DEIS schools have not been permitted to join the Reading Recovery programme in light of the extensive programme of support now available to all schools in the area of literacy.

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) has reported positively on the range of interventions, including Reading Recovery, in place for DEIS schools. Inspectorate evaluations also demonstrate that the effectiveness of specialised programmes is maximised when they are integrated into the overall literacy programme in a school.

Support for all schools, DEIS and non DEIS, provided by the PDST takes this into account as part of the ongoing professional development programme for “Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life - The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People 2011 - 2020” and its “Interim Review Report 2017”.

### **Schools Building Projects**

61. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provision that will be included in the capital plan regarding school facilities and increased capacity to reflect the increased development in view of the extensive land rezoning in the mid-east region and the large development proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24468/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department’s own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

My Department is included among the prescribed bodies to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development and local area plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment and observations. This enables local authorities to reserve future school sites in areas designated for proposed housing development.

My Department’s 6 Year Capital Programme prioritises building projects for areas where there is increased demography. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

All school planning areas nationwide are being kept under ongoing review by my Department. This review takes account of updated data from CSO, enrolment and child benefit data and also the impact of existing and planned capacity increases to schools in these areas.

## **Schools Building Projects**

62. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the need for a new school campus on the Curragh, County Kildare, to improve the facilities available for children in the area and increase capacity in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24732/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department's Six-Year Capital Programme prioritises building projects for areas of demographic growth. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

While my Department is aware that some consideration is being given locally to applying for replacement accommodation for the Curragh primary schools, no proposals in this regard have been received. Additional post-primary capacity is currently being provided in Newbridge and my Department will continue to monitor demographics to identify where additional school places will be required nationally, including in County Kildare.

## **Apprenticeship Programmes**

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the low uptake of apprenticeships by females; his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24662/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** As the Deputy is aware, in order to be registered as an apprentice by SOLAS, a person must be employed by an approved employer in one of the craft trades. Recruitment to apprenticeship is therefore driven by employers rather than by SOLAS or by education and training providers.

The 2014 Review of Apprenticeship in Ireland acknowledged the number of women employed in craft apprenticeships has been low as these programmes operate in sectors that have traditionally low levels of female employment. While SOLAS offers a bursary to employers to encourage them to employ female apprentices, the number remains low.

Currently the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. The first of these new apprenticeships were launched in 2016, with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship getting underway in November. We have already seen an increase in female participation in these new programmes with almost 40% of the initial intake on the Insurance Practitioner programme being female. 13 further new apprenticeships will get underway in 2017, many of which are in sectors where there is a different gender balance in the workplace and I am confident, as these new apprenticeships are rolled out, that this will lead to a continued increase in female participation.

As set out in the recently published Action Plan to Extend Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, my Department will, in conjunction with SOLAS, review the pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of diverse groups, including female participation, in light of the broadening of the apprenticeship system into new areas. The review will be completed in 2018 and any recommendations made will be implemented immediately.



Recently, a digital campaign to promote apprenticeship got underway with a dedicated Twitter feed #Generation Apprenticeship, a new apprenticeship website [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie), an Apprenticeship Ireland Facebook page and a LinkedIn page. In all aspects of the digital campaign women feature prominently and as the campaign rolls out, there will be a specific focus on encouraging women and girls to consider apprenticeship as a means of launching or developing their careers.

### **Arts in Education Charter**

64. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions his Department has taken to co-operate with the Department Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to fast-track and resource the arts in education charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24465/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Arts in Education Charter, launched in 2013, has been a landmark development. The Charter is an initiative of my Department, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, working in association with the Arts Council. Through the co-operation of both Departments and the Arts Council, good progress has been made on implementation of the Charter objectives to date.

One of the commitments in the Arts in Education Charter is to support and encourage schools to make their facilities available for out-of-hours community, recreational and cultural activities, in so far as is practicable. Many schools already make their premises available to the local community outside of school hours; and schools profit from an improved relationship with the wider community as a result. Being linked effectively with the local community can help the school to provide a wider curriculum and range of co-curricular activities.

It is for this reason that my Department has published in 2016 “Looking at our Schools 2016” - A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and “School Self-evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools”. These guidelines suggest that the relationship between the school and the wider community should form one of the self-evaluation criteria for schools. Schools shall now in their school policies and plans, where possible, include arts-in-education opportunities as an important aspect of enriching the curriculum and the wider life of the school.

Ireland’s first Arts in Education Portal was launched in May 2015. The Arts in Education Portal was developed in partnership with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and has become a key national resource for arts education.

In 2015, Music Generation Ltd. announced Phase 2 of the initiative during which up to 9 additional new Music Education Partnerships will be established over the period from 2017 up to 2021. The application process for these new partnerships is currently underway.

‘Creative Ireland’ is the Government’s legacy programme to the successful ‘Ireland 2016’ initiative. It is a five-year programme, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy. The Arts in Education Charter is to be embraced, fast-tracked and further resourced over the coming years as part of the Creative Ireland programme.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

65. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the decision on the proposed amalgamation of two schools (details supplied) in County Kildare



to allow the schools to make plans for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24727/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department recently received correspondence from the Patron of the schools in question relating to a proposal to amalgamate both schools. My Department subsequently sought additional information from the Patron relating to the proposal and this has now been received. My Department will be in further contact with the Patron when the additional information has been considered.

### School Curriculum

66. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of boys and girls respectively who study home economics at junior certificate level; and if he will consider making the subject compulsory at that level. [24725/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In 2016, a total of 21,464 students sat Junior Cycle Home Economics as part of the State Examinations. 15,848 female students sat the Junior Cycle Higher Level Home Economics examination, while 2,079 male students sat the paper. At ordinary Level 2,307 female students and 1,230 male students sat the paper.

There are no plans to make the subject compulsory in the Junior Cycle.

A new specification for Home Economics will be introduced to schools, in September 2018, in line with the continuing programme of curriculum reform for Junior Cycle. This specification was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment following broad consultation.

### Institutes of Technology Staff

67. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to bring about the appointment of a president for Dundalk Institute of Technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24462/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A competition for the position of President of Dundalk IT was held by the Public Appointments Service in 2016. Unfortunately the outcome of that competition was unsuccessful. It has been agreed to run a new competition for the appointment of the President using the frameworks for such a recruitment process as set out by the Office of Government Procurement.

This process has commenced and it is envisaged that it will be brought to a successful conclusion prior to the retirement of the current President in August 2017.

### Third Level Qualifications Recognition

68. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the treatment of pharmacy students in Trinity College Dublin, UCD and RCSI whose degrees have been changed and as a result they now have to pay masters degree level fees for their final year tuition and have to undergo an unpaid placement rather than a

paid placement in their final year; if he was consulted with regard to this change; his views on whether it should be permissible; and if he will engage with the presidents of these institutions to reverse these changes. [24663/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The education and training of pharmacists to first registration is specified in EU legislation (Article 44 of Directive 2005/36/EC) and consists of a five-year education and training programme, which must include a minimum of six months' practical training under the supervision of a pharmacist.

In Ireland, the Pharmacy Act 2007 conferred responsibility on the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), the pharmacy regulator, with respect to pharmacy education and training.

The 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 which includes representatives of PSI, Department of Health, Higher Education Authority, community, hospital and industry pharmacists, patient, student and international expertise.

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.

In that context, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in the changes to the Pharmacy programmes.

### **Schools Site Acquisitions**

69. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the purchase of a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; if his Department has made offers to land owners for a site; when a site is expected to be purchased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24467/17]

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

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

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

Officials from my Department have arranged to meet with officials from the relevant local

authority to discuss the matter with a view to determining the best means to expedite the site acquisition.

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

### **Proposed Legislation**

70. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the legislative proposals his Department is working on to make it an offence to advertise and provide academic cheating services for students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24659/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I published the General Scheme of a Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill on Monday 15th May 2017, following approval by Government.

This new Bill contains provisions which will make it an offence to provide or advertise any form of academic cheating services such as those provided by essay mill companies.

The type of approach that is proposed in the General Scheme will ensure that Ireland is one of the first countries to take measures to address this issue.

The General Scheme of the Bill will now be submitted to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

### **Special Educational Needs**

71. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the supply of ASD schools across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24729/17]

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

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

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

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

My Department previously funded 13 centres through an ABA pilot scheme funded for the period 1999-2011. All of these centres applied for and were granted provisional recognition as special schools for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in 2010 and are currently being

supported by my Department under a transitional agreement. These schools now form part of the network of specialised placements for students with ASD.

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 and special schools in various geographical areas where there is an identified need and 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 special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1152 across the country in 2017, of which 888 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

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

The NCSE has informed the 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. This will include 17 new ASD early intervention classes, 100 new primary ASD classes and 45 new post-primary ASD classes.

### **DEIS Administration**

72. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason data on junior certificate retention rates by school, junior certificate exam results aggregated to school level and or leaving certificate retention rates by school were not used to identify post-primary schools that had high levels of disadvantage for the DEIS identification process; and the further reason he is of the view it is an improvement to exclude information on actual education outcomes from the identification process in favour of purely using information on the socio-economic context of a school, which is only moderately correlated with actual education outcomes. [24666/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, the publication in February last of DEIS Plan 2017 was preceded by a comprehensive DEIS Review process which included the work of a Technical Group to consider appropriate eligibility criteria to identify the level of need in schools and to develop an appropriate methodology for a new assessment framework.

The Technical Group undertook an extensive body of work and research which is set out in the Report on the Review of DEIS which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Report.pdf>. This work included a review of the methodologies used in 2005 and the options now available given developments in the availability of centrally held data. It also took account of the experience of the implementation of DEIS to date and through comprehensive stakeholder consultation.

The DEIS Review consultation process noted stakeholder concerns about the use of educational outcomes as a basis for extending DEIS supports to schools, or for reducing such supports. In particular it was felt that outcomes achieved due directly to the input of specific additional resources and supports should not be used as a means to remove these supports from schools. It was considered that this would give rise to a perception of penalising success and

rewarding failure.

As the Deputy is aware, an identification process has been developed which uses CSO Small Area data as represented in the Haase Pratschke Index of Deprivation (HP Index) combined with DES Primary and Post Primary data supplied by schools.

There is a strong focus in DEIS Plan 2017 on supporting schools to achieve improved outcomes, rather than using those outcomes to determine the level of supports they might receive.

The use of the HP Index in the context of educational disadvantage is consistent with its use across a broad range of Government Departments, agencies and various public sector entities. The index contains variables which provide a measure of the underlying risk of educational disadvantage and the exploratory analysis conducted by the Educational Research Centre shows that there is a moderate to strong correlation between scores on the HP index and poorer educational outcomes across the school spectrum, particularly in urban and post primary schools.

It is important to note that as part of my announcement in February in launching DEIS Plan 2017, I made it clear that we would continue to conduct further analysis to examine other strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation. In view of this, as set out in both the Report on the Review of DEIS and DEIS Plan 2017, the Technical Group will continue its work, supplemented as necessary by additional research and data expertise.

A key objective of DEIS Plan 2017 is to achieve a more dynamic and tailored process for the assessment of schools which will more closely match resources to identified need.

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board**

73. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of external companies or organisations or bodies that Caranua have engaged for a fee since its inception in tabular form; the fees that these entities have charged; the source the fees were paid from; the justification provided from Caranua for the services of these entities; his views on whether these charges could have been avoided by proper governance of Caranua in view of recent revelations regarding Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24670/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. Section 7(7) of that Act provides that the Board, as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions and with the approval of the Minister, may enter into contracts with persons and engage consultants or advisers under terms and conditions that the Board considers appropriate. Section 7(7) also provides that sums payable to persons, consultants or advisers shall be paid by the Board out of moneys at its disposal.

Details of the contracts and consultancies, etc., approved under section 7(7) since the establishment of the organisation in 2013 are set out in the tabular statement. Consideration of the items listed in the following table was undertaken following receipt of business cases from Caranua.

All of Caranua's costs, including those relating to contracts and consultancies, are charged on the NTMA investment account which is funded by religious contributions. This arises from the provision in section 30(1) of the 2012 Act which states that the "expenses and other costs incurred by the Agency under this Act shall, subject to the approval of the Board, be charged on



the investment account to the benefit of the Agency”.

Approvals issued by the Minister for Education and Skills under section 7(7) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012

Date	Contractor/Consultant	Purpose
02/04/2014	Exchequer Software Ltd.	Acquisition of Financial Management System
15/6/2014 26/9/2014 15/10/2014 11/8/2015	CPL Recruitment	Provision of agency staff
17/09/2014		Entering into a proposed lease on new accommodation including engagement of architectural firm. (Note: project was not proceeded with.)
21/10/2014		Approval to seek tenders to undertake a review of Caranua’s structures, processes and systems
11/08/2015	Achilles	Provision of advice and support in procurement
11/08/2015	Acumen	Preparation of Board handbook
11/08/2015	Acumen	Set up of case management system
11/08/2015	Ampersand	Facilitation of session of Board
11/08/2015	Ampersand	Facilitation of Board meeting
11/08/2015	Ampersand	Facilitation of management team for staff meeting
11/08/2015	An Post Mails Revenue	PO Box Licence and Freepost Licences
11/08/2015	Anna Carroll	Training for staff member
11/08/2015	Athena Media	Historical research
11/08/2015	Athena Media	Communications strategy
11/08/2015	Beverly Smith & Sons	Furniture removal
11/08/2015	Bill Moss & Partners	Addresses of parish priests for mailshot.
11/08/2015	Blacknight Internet	Hosting of website
11/08/2015	Bluewave Technologies	Further development of Salesforce CRM System
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Design of new corporate identity.
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Branded stationery
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Design and development of new temporary website
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Design of Application Form Pt 1 and guidelines
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Design of Application Form Pt 2 and Guidelines 2nd Edition
11/08/2015	Brendan Foreman Design	Sub-contracting of printing of applications and guidelines
11/08/2015	Byrne Wallace Solicitors	Legal advice
11/08/2015	Brian Harvey	Summary of Oireachtas debates
11/08/2015	BT Communications Ireland Ltd	Computer hardware & software
11/08/2015	Caroline O’Leary	Irish Sign Language interpretation
11/08/2015	Carlin Marketing	Working with subcommittee on rebranding
11/08/2015	Carlin Marketing	Drafting rationale for rebranding



Date	Contractor/Consultant	Purpose
11/08/2015	Cathleen Anne Ronayne	Assist with payroll calculations
11/08/2015	Character Print Solutions	Print and distribute copies of Application Form Pt 1 & Guidelines
11/08/2015	Character Print Solutions	Printing of letterheads etc.
11/08/2015	Ciara Murray	Examine the implications of working through delivery partners
11/08/2015	Codex	Provision of stationery supplies
11/08/2015	CPL Admin	
11/08/2015	Crowleys DFK	EFB Audit
11/08/2015	Datapac	ICT equipment (laptops, printers)
11/08/2015	David Palmer Enterprises	Moving of office furniture
11/08/2015	Dreamhost	Hosts emails and website
11/08/2015	Dublin Rape Crisis Centre	Training course
11/08/2015	Eircom	Provision of telephone services
11/08/2015	Eircom Business Systems	New phone management system
11/08/2015	Emobile	Provision of 6 mobile phones
11/08/2015	FEXCO	Foreign payments and anonymised cheque payments
11/08/2015	Focus Training	Staff training
11/08/2015	Focused Solutions	Support to admin staff
11/08/2015	Fruit Design	Design of Online Application Form Part 1
11/08/2015	Fruit Design	Website design
11/08/2015	Graphite HRM	HR support
11/08/2015	Harcourt Printing	Stationery supplies
11/08/2015	Hyperlink Ltd	Placing of invitation to tender for baseline study on Activelink website
11/08/2015	Inform Display Systems	Distribution of Application Form Pt 1 to health service
11/08/2015	Iron Mountain	Confidential document destruction
11/08/2015	Ita Mangan	Research on entitlements.
11/08/2015	Joan O'Flynn	Facilitation session
11/08/2015	Jury's Inn	Accommodation for Board members
11/08/2015	Jury's Inn	Use of meeting rooms
11/08/2015	Kent Carthy Solicitors	Legal advice
11/08/2015	Liz Challoner	Acceptable behaviour policy
11/08/2015	Ms Liz Challoner	Admin support
11/08/2015	Ms Liz Challoner	Admin support
11/08/2015	Maureen Lynott	Design of criteria
11/08/2015	Micromail	Microsoft licences
11/08/2015	MJ Flood	Provision of a photocopier
11/08/2015	NALA	"Plain English" of forms and other documentation
11/08/2015	National Radio Cabs	Provision of Taxi services
11/08/2015	Novosco	New server and ongoing ICT support.
11/08/2015	Novosco	Urgent work on email system
11/08/2015	Office Depot (Ireland) Ltd	Paper for printing

*Questions - Written Answers*

Date	Contractor/Consultant	Purpose
11/08/2015	Pitney Bowes Purchase Power	Postage costs (franking machine)
11/08/2015	Pony Express	Courier services
11/08/2015	Q4 Public Relations	Advice on wording of letter
11/08/2015	Q4 Public Relations	Design and content for website
11/08/2015	Q4 Public Relations	Updating website
11/08/2015	Regent Catering	Provision of lunch etc for Board meetings
11/08/2015	Salesforce	Provision of licences for use of salesforce
11/08/2015	Salespulse	Maintenance support for data base
11/08/2015	Shred-It	Secure destruction of paper
11/08/2015	Silverlink	Design of temporary website.
11/08/2015	Snap Printing	Printing of guidelines
11/08/2015	Softex	Support for phone management software
11/08/2015	Irish Post	Annual sub.
11/08/2015	Temporary Information Officers	
11/08/2015	Treacy Consulting	Research project - service pathways.
11/08/2015	Unity	Provision of ICT support
11/08/2015	Unity	Provision of new firewall
11/08/2015	Viking Direct	Provision of stationery supplies
11/08/2015	Wateross Management Ltd	Advice on development & implementation of scheme.
11/08/2015	Weafer and Associates Research and Consultancy Ltd	Baseline awareness study
27/08/2015		Approval to seek tenders for the procurement of internal audit services
27/08/2015		Approval to seek tenders for the procurement of accountancy services

Note: Where the box for contractor/consultant is blank it signifies that approval in principle was given by the Minister for Education and Skills for Caranua to commence a procurement process for the particular service.

### **Schools Extra Curricular Activities**

74. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to diocesan advisers visiting primary schools across the country to monitor and evaluate a programme (details supplied); if these advisers are vetted and checked by his Department; if the attention of the parents of children attending these schools are drawn to the visits beforehand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24461/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that religious education is one of the seven curricular areas of the Primary Curriculum (1999) and primary schools are currently required to allocate thirty minutes per day for religious instruction. However, unlike other subject areas, the content of the religious curriculum provided by schools is not set by the Department of Education and Skills. The Education Act recognises the rights of the different church authorities to design curricula in religious education and to

supervise their teaching and implementation. This means that the content of the religious education programme in a particular primary school is determined by the patron of the school.

In relation to Garda vetting, the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) was commenced by my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality in April of last year and put in place certain statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable persons. When the vetting requirements were commenced last year, my Department issued circular 0031/2016 which set out the statutory vetting requirements applicable to schools along with the practical arrangements in place to support the vetting procedures. A Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document was also published by the Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular. Responsibility for ensuring that any statutory vetting requirements are met rests with each individual school authority. It is therefore a matter for each school authority to determine, having regard to the particular circumstances in question and the requirements of the Vetting Act, whether any vetting requirement applies in respect of a person or persons undertaking work in the school.

### Schools Property

75. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the playing fields at a school (details supplied) will not be sold off by the Christian Brothers congregation, thereby depriving the school of the pitches adjacent to its school building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24731/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In early May, the Christian Brothers congregation wrote to me on the wider issue of the transfer of ownership of its playing fields to the Edmund Rice Schools Trust, ERST.

That recent correspondence also noted the proposal to dispose of part of the lands at the school to which the Deputy refers, a post-primary school under the patronage of ERST, and it states that contracts have already been signed with a builder. The congregation's letter states that its intention is to use part of the proceeds of the disposal to meet its outstanding contribution of €8.8 million relating to the voluntary offer it made in 2009 in response to the findings of the Ryan report. The congregation also advised me that it will have provided the college with 6.5 acres, inclusive of the school and lands transferred in 2008 and the 3.5 acres of playing grounds now transferring.

I am not privy to the deliberations or the debates within the congregation on why these particular lands were selected for disposal.

As I noted, the congregation has an outstanding redress contribution of €8.8 million. Completion of this contribution at an early date is vital because it will ensure that Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund, will have available to it the full €110 million in cash contributions offered by the religious congregations. I appreciate that the Christian Brothers wish to follow through on their commitments, having already paid €21.2 million of their voluntary cash offer.

It would, however, also be very disappointing if the educational needs of the current and future generations of children were compromised in achieving this goal. I would hope that the congregation takes this fully into account during its deliberations.

There is a role for the school patron, ERST, to ensure that the current and potential future educational needs of the school, including the capacity of the school to meet future enrolment

demands, are prioritised.

My Department will be writing to the congregation on the matter of the lands adjacent to the school to which the Deputy refers, seeking clarification on a number of points, including whether the land in question is now the subject of a legally-binding agreement with a builder.

### **Educational Supports**

76. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the educational supports which have been put in place to ease the particular difficulties faced by migrant children and those in direct provision when transitioning from primary to secondary education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24387/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Educational supports are on the basis of identified need. At both primary and post-primary levels, additional language support is provided for students who do not speak English as their first language. English as an Additional Language (EAL) resources are designed to allow individual students to participate in mainstream education on a par with their peers. Additional supports are provided on the basis of identified educational need.

Since the academic year 2014/15, the Education Passport has been in operation. The Education Passport Material includes a 6th Class Report, a Profile of the student by the student and a profile of the student by the parent/guardian. This suite of materials is transferred from the primary to the post-primary school. The materials aim to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and of transferring pupil information from primary to post-primary schools.

Children who present with special educational needs are assessed by the relevant health and education professionals, and are linked with the relevant education provision most suited to their needs. These include:

- additional teaching support from a learning support or resource teacher
- a special class in a mainstream school with a lower pupil teacher ratio specified according to the category of disability e.g. a special class for children with autistic spectrum disorder;
- a special school with a lower pupil-teacher ratio specified according to the category of disability e.g. a special school for children with moderate general learning disability.

All asylum seekers are medical card holders and, inter alia, they are exempt from the fees for State examinations (the Leaving and Junior Certificate).

### **School Admissions**

77. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the organisations and schools which made a submission to the public consultation on the role of denominational religion in the school admissions process in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24459/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public consultation process on the role of denominational religion in the school admissions process and possible approaches for making changes accepted written submissions from 24th January to 20th March 2017.

24 May 2017

Almost 1,000 written submissions were received. 744 submissions were made by individuals, 118 submissions were made by schools and 62 submissions were made by stakeholder organisations.

Submissions may be published in due course on my Department's website subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Acts.

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

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

### **School Admissions**

78. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of submissions he received from persons as part of the public consultation on the role of denominational religion in the school admissions process; the number of single email submissions he received from persons as part of the public consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24460/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public consultation process on the role of denominational religion in the school admissions process and possible approaches for making changes accepted written submissions from 24th January to 20th March 2017.

Almost 1,000 written submissions were received. 744 submissions were made by individuals, 118 submissions were made by schools and 62 submissions were made by stakeholder organisations.

Submissions may be published in due course on my Department's website subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Acts.

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

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

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

79. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans and the timeframe to ensure that the principle of equal pay for equal work will be restored in first and second level teaching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24458/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Equality and fairness are

of course at the heart of everything this Government is trying to do, particularly in the education area where I am particularly focused on creating better opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas in our schools system and in higher education.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours.

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

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

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servants and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would also not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean that we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

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

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

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of public service pay talks. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation and these discussions are now underway.



80. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether unemployed teachers should be prioritised in the selection of suitable candidates for superintending State exams. [24656/17]

**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.

### **Legislative Process**

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Equal Status (Admissions to School) Bill 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24661/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, last June, the Government proposed and the Dáil agreed that the Labour Party's Equal Status (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 would come before the Dáil for a second stage hearing no earlier than 28th June 2017 to allow for scrutiny by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills and for the Committee to consider submissions and hold hearings.

As the Deputy will be aware I ran a public consultation process from 24th January to 20th March 2017 on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes. The written consultation process attracted almost 1,000 responses from a combination of individuals, schools and stakeholder organisations.

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

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

### **Garda Deployment**

82. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of armed gardaí policing airports currently; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24814/17]

**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, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

The Garda authorities will continue to take all necessary security measures proportionate

to the level of terrorist threat and all the relevant agencies here co-operate closely in respect of any threats identified. The Deputy will understand, of course, that the detail of such security measures, including the number and nature of Gardaí assigned to particular areas, cannot be disclosed publicly for obvious reasons. An Garda Síochána has developed considerable operational capacities in countering terrorism and in responding to critical incidents. There is, in particular, a highly trained and well-equipped special intervention capability in the Emergency Response Unit that is supported by the regional Armed Support Units and the range of other resources across the Garda organisation. In addition, the considerable skills and resources of the Defence Forces are also available in support where needed.

While there are a number of persons here whose activities in support of extremism give rise to concern they will continue to be monitored closely by the Garda authorities and all appropriate measures will be taken in this regard.

### **Garda Deployment**

83. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí currently assigned to the Kildare division; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24815/17]

**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. The Commissioner has advised that all Gardaí, not simply designated Community Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises and, in that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within An Garda Síochána.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that, as of the 31 March 2017, there were 323 Garda including 4 Community Garda together with 22 Garda Reserves 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, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

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 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.

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that just under 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide 50 of whom have been 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 including Community Gardaí across every Garda Division in the coming years. To ensure a continuous pipeline of candidates a new recruitment drive was launched by the Commissioner earlier this month with a closing date of 1 June. The competition is being undertaken by the Public Appointment Service on behalf of the Commissioner and applications should be made to [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie).

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

### **Garda Equipment**

84. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the necessary funding to replace the Osprey rigid inflatable boat for the Garda water unit, in view of the fact it is over 20 years old. [24836/17]

85. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the necessary funding to replace one of the Zodiac inflatable boats for the Garda water unit which is over 17 years old. [24837/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 84 and 85 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources among the various Garda Divisions, including the Garda water unit and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am, however, assured that Garda management keeps these resources under continual review so as to ensure that they are fit for purpose in the context of operational needs.

I understand that the Garda Water Unit provides a full dive and marine capability throughout the State and responds to requests for assistance from within An Garda Síochána and other relevant agencies. It has at its disposal two patrol boats, four rigid inflatable boats and nine inflatable boats.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the osprey rigid inflatable vessel referred to by the Deputy is currently undergoing a refit in respect of navigation and communication equipment and that this is in addition to significant refurbishment of the vessel in recent years. I have been further informed that all of the boats currently allocated to the Garda Water Unit meet the present requirements of the Unit and that the equipment fitted on the boats is regularly serviced and upgraded when necessary.

### Garda Transport Data

86. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of extra marked and unmarked Garda cars and vans allocated to the Garda district R in 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of vehicles in this district which were withdrawn during the same period. [24838/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will be appreciate decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when it is to hand I will inform the Deputy accordingly.

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

I refer to Parliamentary Question No. 86 for answer on 24th May, 2017, in which you requested details regarding Garda vehicles allocated and withdrawn in Dublin 'R' District during the periods 2016 and to date.

As you will recall, the information you requested could not be obtained in the time available.

I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the Garda 'R' District is part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division and that there are some 115 vehicles allocated to the Division. The allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis by An Garda Síochána. I am further advised by the Garda authorities that the responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official Garda vehicles in the DMR is assigned to Assistant Commissioner DMR, who may allocate vehicles between stations as required by operational requirements.

The following table outlines details of additional cars and vans allocated to, and those decommissioned from the DMR North Division and the 'R' District in 2016 and to date in 2017. Additional Cars and Vans allocated in the DMR North Division in 2016 and to date in 2017:

Year	Marked Cars	Unmarked Cars	Marked Vans	Unmarked Vans	Total Vehicles
2016	2	6	6	3	17

2017	0	2	0	0	2
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Cars and Vans Decommissioned in the DMR North Division in 2016 and to date in 2017:

Year	Marked Cars	Unmarked Cars	Marked Vans	Unmarked Vans	Total Vehicles
2016	3	11	4	0	18
2017	0	4	0	3	7

The following table provides details of the additional cars and vans allocated to, and those decommissioned in the R District in 2016 and to date in 2017. Cars and Vans allocated to the R District in 2016 and to date in 2017:

Year	CARS		VANS		Total
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	
2016	0	1	1	0	2
2017	1	2	0	0	3

Cars and Vans Decommissioned in the R District in 2016 and to date in 2017:

Year	CARS		VANS		Total
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	
2016	2	3	0	0	5
2017	1	3	0	0	4

I trust this information is of assistance.

### Visa Applications

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of a visa renewal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24839/17]

**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 arrived in the State in September 2007 and that their last student permission expired on 4 October 2016.

Their request for permission to remain in the State is currently under consideration and a decision will issue to them in the very near future.

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

### Road Traffic Accidents Data

88. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic collisions involving drivers in the emergency services, namely



gardaí, ambulance drivers, those working for the various fire brigades and ministerial drivers, there have been in each of the years to 2011 to 2016; the number of these road traffic collisions that resulted in a fatality; the number of these road traffic collisions that resulted in a serious injury; the number of these road traffic collisions that resulted in an injury; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24907/17]

89. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of road traffic collisions involving a member of An Garda Síochána in which the officer was driving under chief's permission in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24908/17]

90. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost to the State to settle claims arising from road traffic collisions involving drivers in the emergency services, namely gardaí, ambulance drivers, those working for the various fire brigades and ministerial drivers, in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24909/17]

91. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the State Claims Agency issued any guidance, report, directive or instruction to the emergency services or individual State arms, such as gardaí, instructing that a particular approach be taken to driving while on duty in each of the years 2011 to 2016; if so, if a copy of that report can be made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24910/17]

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

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy. An Garda Síochána has provided the following table, which sets out the cost to the State to settle claims arising from road traffic collisions involving drivers in the emergency services from 2011 to 2016:

Year	Amount
2011	€2,656,579
2012	€1,998,237
2013	€3,292,628
2014	€2,208,168
2015	€2,251,158
2016	€2,813,719

I will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a further Garda report relating to the additional matters raised by the Deputy.

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

I refer to Parliamentary Question No. 89 for answer on Wednesday, 24 May, 2017, in which you asked “the number of road traffic collisions involving a member of An Garda Síochána where the officer was driving under the chief's permission in each of the years 2011 to 2016”.

As you will recall, the information you requested could not be obtained in the time available, and I undertook to contact you directly on receipt of a report from An Garda Síochána.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table details the number of road traffic collisions involving members driving on Chief's Permission from 2013 to 2016. I am advised by An Garda Síochána that the figures prior to 2013 are not available.

24 May 2017

Please note that these statistics are provisional, operational and liable to change and are valid as of 24 May 2017.

With regard to Parliamentary Question No. 91 which was also due for answer on Wednesday, 24 May 2017, I have no responsibility for the issuing of ‘guidance, report, directive or instruction’ documents by the State Claims Agency. However, to be of assistance, I have forwarded your query to that Agency for attention and direct reply.

I hope this information is of assistance.

The number of road traffic collisions involving members of An Garda Síochána who were driving on the Chief’s Permission from 2013 to 2016.

Year	Number of Road Traffic Collisions involving members of An Garda Síochána driving with Chief’s permission*
2013	118
2014	114
2015	75
2016	54

\*Figures are provisional, operational and liable to change and are valid as of 24 May 2017.

### Legal Aid Service

92. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to restrict the availability of free legal aid to repeat offenders or to make such recipients of free legal aid liable to make some repayments to the State in view of the costs incurred; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24920/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy is aware the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme is a vital element of the criminal justice system. The Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962 provides that free legal aid may be granted in certain circumstances for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. Under the 1962 Act, the courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. An applicant must establish to the satisfaction of the court that their means are insufficient to enable them to pay for legal representation themselves. The court must also be satisfied that, by reason of the “gravity of the charge” or “exceptional circumstances”, it is essential in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal aid. An applicant’s previous convictions are not a criterion for access to legal aid under the Act. I have no function in these matters which are determined by the judiciary.

These provisions must have regard to the right to a fair trial, including the provision of legal aid where appropriate, which is a Constitutional right upheld by the courts in a number of judgments. The Supreme Court ruling in the case of State (Healy) v Donoghue [1976]I.R. 325 effectively determined that the right to criminal legal aid is, in circumstances which are quite wide in practice, a Constitutional right. Article 6(3)(c) of the European Convention on Human Rights states that “Everyone charged with a criminal offence has [the right] to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require”.

As the Deputy will be aware, an accused person is entitled to a presumption of innocence and legal representation and any obstacles to obtaining necessary legal aid which were found to be unreasonable could give a defendant an avenue for appeal or prohibition of the prosecution.

The overriding concern is to ensure that no risk arises in relation to the prosecution of persons charged with criminal offences before the courts.

Work on the preparation of a draft General Scheme of a Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill is at an advanced stage in my Department. The key purpose of the legislation is to transfer the administration of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme to the Legal Aid Board and to give effect to Government Programme commitments in respect of criminal legal aid, including introducing a more rigorous and objective means testing system for criminal legal aid, provision for contributions, and new sanctions. It is my intention to seek approval of Government for the General Scheme of the Bill and submit it to the Oireachtas for pre-legislative scrutiny as early as is practicable.

### Visa Data

93. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of long-stay join family single entry D visas issued in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of refusals for same; the average processing time; the process involved in processing this category; the number issued on a country basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24989/17]

**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 tables set out the position in relation to the ten highest number of applications by nationality and a combined figure for all other nationalities (up to 90) for the years requested by the Deputy.

I am further advised by INIS that the time taken to complete “join family” visa applications in the Dublin Visa office where all necessary information is available to the Visa Officer is currently 5 months. This is within the business target time of 6 to 12 months for this type of visa application. Applications processed in the seven Visa Offices abroad generally have a shorter processing time.

While every effort generally is made to process these applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of applications, their complexity, the possible need to investigate, enquire into, or seek further information in relation to certain applications, and the resources available. Any delays in achieving the business target are primarily related to the processing of more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required.

Further information on the application process is available on the INIS website at - <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Join%20Family>

2015

	Decided	Granted	Refused
India	1,448	1,408	40
Pakistan	600	529	71
Saudi Arabia	388	388	0
People's Republic of China	379	349	30
Philippines	329	288	41

24 May 2017

	Decided	Granted	Refused
Nigeria	199	135	64
Ukraine	173	172	1
Egypt	166	150	16
Russian Federation	151	148	3
Sudan	138	136	2
Others	1,329	1,129	200
Total	5,300	4,832 (91%)	468 (9%)

2016

	Decided	Granted	Refused
India	1,934	1,913	21
Pakistan	515	487	28
Saudi Arabia	512	507	5
People's Republic of China	385	376	9
Egypt	290	277	13
Nigeria	222	151	71
Philippines	202	194	8
Sudan	164	163	1
Russian Federation	150	147	3
Ukraine	99	94	5
Others	1,323	1,153	170
Total	5,796	5,462 (94%)	334 (6%)

2017 (up to 22 May)

	Decided	Granted	Refused
India	713	700	13
Pakistan	371	300	71
Philippines	118	94	24
People's Republic of China	115	108	7
Egypt	84	82	2
Saudi Arabia	76	76	0
Nigeria	75	62	13
Sudan	60	60	0
Syrian Arab Republic	48	44	4
Bangladesh	46	42	4
Other	460	401	59
Total	2,166	1,969 (91%)	197 (9%)

**Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision**

94. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance the procedures in place to ensure that persons do not experience difficulties in obtaining and retaining insurance cover on their properties, in view of the fact that they are built on an area which has long been acknowledged as a flood plain. [24834/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to householders and businesses alike, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years in order to minimise the risk of flooding.

However, the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. In my role as Minister for Finance, I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems. This in turn should lead to the increased availability of flood insurance. To achieve this aim, there is a focus on:

- prioritising spending on flood relief measures by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and relevant local authorities,
- development and implementation of plans by the OPW to implement flood relieve schemes, and
- improving channels of communication between the OPW and the insurance industry in order to reach a better understanding about the provision of flood cover in marginal areas.

Finally, as the Deputy will be aware, a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance and believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

### Property Tax Data

95. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected in local property tax in County Kildare in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24816/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that the most recently available information relating to Local Property Tax (LPT) can be found on the statistics webpage of the Revenue website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/local-property-tax.html>, including LPT collected in respect of County Kildare. This includes LPT collected for the years 2013 to 2016 and the first quarter of 2017.



## Motor Insurance Coverage

96. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to include a driver's experience abroad when applying for insurance upon returning here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24817/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level that they should apply to particular categories of individuals.

Notwithstanding the above, I am aware of the matter raised by the Deputy. I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. The Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. It contains 33 recommendations and 71 actions which are detailed in an action plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation. Recommendation 6 of the Report, in particular, aims to address the problems faced by returning emigrants regarding the recognition of no claims bonuses through the introduction of a standard protocol for insurance providers, to ensure a greater consistency of treatment for returning emigrants. This is required to be in place by the end of 2017.

Also the Deputy should note that by Q2 2017, insurers are being asked to implement procedures when pricing a policy to enable the acceptance of driver experience from abroad when a person has previous driving experience in Ireland and is coming from a country that drives on the left side of road. By Q4 2017, insurers are being asked to implement a similar procedure in relation to experience gained in a country that drives on the right hand side of the road. Insurance Ireland will submit a report to my Department on the implementation of these procedures in Q2 and Q4 2017.

## Motor Insurance

97. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the intended composition of the forum for consumer and business interests in respect of motor insurance under action point nine in the report on the cost of motor insurance in tabular form; if a group (details supplied) will be the sole representative of the insurance business or if it is his plan to specifically include brokers as a key part of the insurance sector on the consumer side; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24841/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In fulfilment of Recommendation 9 in the Action Plan of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, Insurance Ireland set up the consumer and business forum in March and invited relevant stakeholders to the first of its biannual meetings.

This meeting, which was opened by the Minister of State, Eoghan Murphy T.D., took place on May 16 and was attended by representatives from:

Insurance Ireland
Department of Finance
Central Bank of Ireland
Financial Services Ombudsman
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
Consumers' Association of Ireland

The Report recommends that the forum is “industry-led” and consequently this explains why Insurance Ireland as the main representative body for insurance providers - with 95% of those companies operating within the country being members - were tasked with organising it.

The first meeting concentrated on the motor insurance sector but it is intended to broaden the scope of the forum, both in terms of the types of insurance to be discussed and the range of participants therein. In this regard, consideration will be given to inviting representation from insurance brokers such as, for example, the Irish Brokers Association, who were consulted with by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in the course of producing the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance.

It is believed that putting in place a structured approach for ongoing engagement between the insurance industry and relevant stakeholders will improve the quantity and quality of communication between providers and consumers, producing a deeper understanding of the pertinent sectorial issues on both sides.

### Financial Services Ombudsman

98. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to strengthen the role of the Financial Services Ombudsman to prevent financial institutions appointing receivers and taking court action on housing properties while such properties are under investigation by the ombudsman for final legally binding determination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24842/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I understand from the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO) that if a Receiver is appointed by the lender, either before a complaint is made to the FSO, or after the FSO has begun dealing with the matter, the appointment of the Receiver will not impede the mediation, investigation or adjudication of the complaint by the FSO.

In that event, the FSO will investigate whether the mortgage deed in place permitted the appointment of a Receiver, and secondly whether it was reasonable and fair for the lender, at the particular point in time, and in the overall circumstances, to proceed with the appointment of a Receiver.

If the FSO upholds the complaint and takes the view that it was wrongful of the lender to have appointed a Receiver, the FSO can direct compensation of up to €250,000 and/or direct such rectification as considered to be appropriate in the circumstances.

While a consumer may not make a complaint if the conduct complained of is or has been the subject of legal proceedings, the FSO may accept a complaint against a financial services provider who has begun legal proceedings if the FSO reasonably suspects that the provider began the proceedings in order to prevent the making of the complaint or to frustrate or delay the investigation.

It is my intention that these existing provisions will be mirrored in the legislation to amalgamate the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman currently before the House.

### **Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme**

99. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the qualifying criteria for the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme and the primary medical certificate which underpins it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24968/17]

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

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

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

The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required under the Regulations to claim the reliefs provided for in the Scheme. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations.

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

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and fuel grant provided for members of the Scheme, the Scheme represented a cost of €65 million in 2016. This does not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

I recognise the important role that the Scheme plays in expanding the mobility of citizens with disabilities and that the relief has been maintained at current levels throughout the crisis

despite the requirement for significant fiscal consolidation. From time to time I receive representations from individuals who feel they would benefit from the Scheme but do not qualify under the six criteria. While I have sympathy for these cases, given the scale and scope of the Scheme, I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond the six currently provided for in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

### **Banking Operations**

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm that a loophole, known as the incurred loss model, which allows banks to hide losses by recognising loans at amounts above the amount the bank expects to recover will not be used in view of the fact that he plans to sell a portion of a bank (details supplied); if will ensure that this bank will reveal details of all losses in its forthcoming prospectus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24984/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, I have no role in the day-to-day management or financial reporting of any bank in which the State is a shareholder. The financial reporting obligations, accounting practices and publication of financial results are matters solely for the Board and Management of each institution.

AIB produces detailed, externally audited accounts in line with international accounting best practice. Further, the provisioning models used by the bank, to account for specific or statistical risk of loss, are assessed and scrutinised by their regulator the Central Bank of Ireland.

I requested that AIB comment on the Deputy's question and they have provided the following response:

“AIB Financial Accounts are prepared in accordance with International Accounting Standards and International Financial Reporting Standards (collectively “IFRSs”).

Accordingly, IAS 39 Financial Instruments: Recognition and Measurement, is applicable and this policy ensures that provisions are made for impairment of financial assets to reflect the losses inherent in those assets at a reporting date (the incurred loss model). Where there is objective evidence that a financial asset is impaired (the discounted future cash flow from the financial asset is lower than its carrying value), a provision is raised.”

### **Teacher Redeployment**

101. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a supplementary teaching panel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24998/17]

102. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will re-examine and amend the decision not to allow admission to a person (details supplied) to the supplementary panel for September 2017 due to the clerical error in respect on their Teaching Council registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24813/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

The core function of the redeployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent/CID holding teachers to schools that have vacancies. Thereafter, schools are

required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers.

Circular 0074/2016 sets out the arrangements for panel access for fixed-term/temporary and part-time teachers to the Supplementary Redeployment Panel for the 2017/18 school year.

Eligibility for the 2017/18 Supplementary Panel is confined to those teachers that have met in full all outstanding conditions/satisfied all shortfalls in respect of registration with the Teaching Council, i.e. are fully probated, at 9 December 2016 as agreed with the relevant education partners.

The teacher referred to by the Deputy has now fulfilled the conditions and has been granted access to the Supplementary panel for 2017/18.

### **Teaching Qualifications**

103. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the incentives which can be offered to teachers of science, technology, engineering and maths, STEM, subjects in order to address the shortage of qualified STEM teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24818/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy is referring to one of actions of the Report of the STEM Education Review Group.

At the launch of the STEM Report I prioritised the implementation of 21 of the Report's 47 actions. One of the actions was to publish a STEM Education policy statement and implementation plan, which I intend to finalise in the coming months. As part of the process in developing the policy statement and implementation plan the remaining actions, including that referred to by the Deputy, will be investigated further.

In the meantime, a new STEM Team will be set up in the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), a support service of my Department, from September of this year. The team will support the achievement of the relevant STEM actions set out in the Action Plan for Education, the priority actions of the Report of the STEM Education Review Group and the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy through the provision of high quality CPD support and resource materials to primary and post-primary teachers of STEM subjects.

The Deputy may also wish to note that my Department continues to fund, at cost of over €5m since 2012, the Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching, a two year part-time programme available nationwide free of charge, to improve the skills of teachers of mathematics at post primary level and enable them register with the Teaching Council as teachers of mathematics. To date over 700 teachers have graduated from this programme, which is led by EPI-STEM, the National Centre for STEM Education at the University of Limerick (UL), and is accredited jointly by UL and NUI Galway through their strategic alliance.

### **National Educational Psychological Service**

104. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to increase access to National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, psychologists for schools in Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24819/17]



**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can inform the Deputy that my Department is actively working with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to fill NEPS psychologist vacancies nationally from a recruitment panel established this year for this purpose. It is envisaged that some 11 staff will be recruited by the end of the current academic year in this regard.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases receive assessment services through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have a student assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. NEPS staff also provide ongoing support, upon request from school authorities, to all schools experiencing critical incidents.

This Government and my Department is committed to supporting the growth of its National Educational Psychological Service to support schools in their support of pupils and particularly those with special need. The Programme for Government commits to expanding NEPS psychologist numbers from its current limit of 173 w.t.e posts to 238 in the lifetime of this Government. As an initial step in realising this ambition I am pleased to say that during 2017 an additional 10 NEPS psychologist are being currently recruited by my Department to be in place by the commencement of the coming academic year to add to the supports provided by this service to schools. These recruits will be engaged in parallel to the intake described above leading to a significant improvement in the NEPS staffing situation both at a national level and also directly improving the staffing numbers in the NEPS Dublin Mid-Leinster Region which through its Naas office provides service to Co. Kildare.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **School Management**

105. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when posts of responsibility will be restored in primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24820/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals at primary level to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

Budget 2017 also provides for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts in both the primary and post-primary sector with effect from the 2017/18 school year. Arrangements for delivery of these posts are currently being discussed with the education partners.

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

standards.

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

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

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

106. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines which exist for primary school principals when numbers dictate that classes need to be amalgamated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24821/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Combined classes are a feature of many primary schools in the country and this arrangement has no adverse implications for the quality of the education children receive. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any one class is kept as low as possible, taking into account factors such as classroom accommodation and fluctuating enrolment. Schools should also use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes. However, it is the responsibility of the Principal teacher in consultation with the teaching staff to decide on the organisation of the pupils for teaching purposes.

This position is reflected in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) which is set out across four stages, with each stage representing two class levels. The curriculum provides for progressive and developmental learning experience for our pupils. General guidance and advice for teachers are provided in National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) curriculum documents, and assessment guidelines etc. that are applicable to all primary schools.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999), which is child-centred rather than subject-centred, also allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods. It emphasises that children should experience learning through a variety of classroom organisational approaches. While these include individual learning and whole-class teaching, the curriculum particularly encourages collaborative learning through pair work and group work as appropriate to the specific learning contexts and goals. Within multi-grade classes, teachers may use a range of models for grouping pupils, including mixed ability grouping. Integration and differentiation are also key approaches in the primary curriculum. The organisation of teaching and learning through integrated themes can be highly motivating and satisfying for children and are particularly useful in multi-class situations.

In general, the view of my Department is that, where combined classes are formed, mixed ability classes are preferable and my Department recommends random selection as a fair and educationally sound approach to the assignment of pupils to such cases.

### **Teacher Training Provision**

107. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the training which is given at primary level regarding the teaching of mixed classes; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [24822/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The teaching of mixed classes, or multi-class teaching as it is more commonly known, is an important aspect of differentiated teaching and learning. All students in initial teacher education courses study the area of differentiation as a mandatory element of their programme, which is set out by the Teaching Council. Students must also undertake a minimum of two placement settings incorporating a variety of teaching situations, class levels and school contexts, including, where possible, multi-class/mixed ability teaching situations. Graduates of primary initial teacher education must also be able to demonstrate that they have established classroom management strategies and organisation skills to cater for a range of classroom situations.

Newly qualified teachers receive additional support in multi-class teaching and differentiation through the mandatory workshop programme provided by the National Induction Programme for Teachers. The Professional Development Service for Teachers provides continuous professional development for teachers in differentiated teaching and learning, which is a core methodology of all classrooms. Discrete support for multi-class teaching is provided through the delivery of customised school-based support to individual schools or to clusters of schools who engage in regional and local projects where schools have multi-class settings.

### DEIS Applications

108. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a DEIS appeal for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24831/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools.

Full details of the process involved in the assessment of schools is available on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>

Schools included in the list published by my Department on 13th February are those whose level of disadvantage has been identified as being at the same level as the current DEIS category for schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage. Schools which have not been included at this stage, including the one referred to by the Deputy, are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new model.

It is important to note that this is a first step in a process and the fact that a school has not been included now does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should the assessment indicate a level of disadvantage that warrants additional supports. I am fully aware that there are further schools whose concentrated level of disadvantage may not be at the highest level, but may nevertheless be at a level which warrants additional supports for pupils under DEIS.

24 May 2017

I am satisfied that the new DEIS Identification Model used to assess the level of disadvantage among the pupil cohort of a school has been applied fairly using centrally held data adopting an objective and scientific approach which has been uniformly applied for all schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy, in the country.

For schools who have concerns about their non-inclusion in the most recent round of DEIS, the following process applies:

- a verification process is currently ongoing in relation to all schools who contacted my Department requesting that their data be validated. This is aimed at ensuring the model was run correctly and the data supplied by the schools through the POD/PPOD systems was correctly used. This process is expected to be concluded shortly and schools will be informed of the results.

- A further process will take account of updated data as it becomes available. All schools, not just those who queried the outcome of the February 2017 process, are being contacted to request them to ensure that their POD/PPOD data is fully correct and up to date, including Eircodes. As soon as the 2016 National Census data becomes available later this summer, this data will be run through the identification model with the fully up-to-date POD/PPOD data. If this exercise reveals that any school which did not qualify for DEIS in the February 2017 round actually meets the criteria applicable to schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage based on the fully up-to-date information then it will be included, subject to resources.

My Department intends to make available to all schools information relating to the identification process and their own individual school data. Arrangements for this are in hand and schools will be advised in due course

I also wish to inform the Deputy that a communication to all schools will issue shortly to provide information on the identification model, including details of how the datasets are used to determine a school's level of disadvantage; the importance of data quality to the process and the need for schools to provide detailed and up to date information to my Department's online pupil databases.

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

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board**

109. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given permission to Caranua to move premises and incur rental costs; if so, when; the nature of the lease in question; the annual rent to be paid by Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24875/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Caranua is an independent statutory body. While my Department has provided advice and assistance to it in regard to its accommodation requirements, statutory responsibility for the decisions taken in regard to accommodation are a matter for the organisation itself and I have no role in those decision making processes. My Department is not in a position to allocate space in any of its premises in Dublin city centre to Caranua. I understand that the Caranua Board and executive have considered

various alternative accommodations and have agreed to a new solution involving a rental payment on the basis that it meets the organisation's business needs and represents value for money having regard to current market conditions. It is important also that the accommodation available to its staff members is of an appropriate standard.

Caranua currently shares accommodation in a property in central Dublin assigned to my Department by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The OPW is leasing this property from the landlord. I understand that the lease on the property is due to expire at the end of this month – the lease having been extended at the request of OPW from its original expiry date of May 2016. The OPW has secured alternative office accommodation in central Dublin for the occupiers of the current premises and I understand that the move to this new accommodation will take place in the near future. OPW has informed my officials that Caranua will not be a party to the lease on the new premises but that there will be a side letter between it and OPW dealing with any relevant issues. I understand that that is OPW's normal practice in such matters. I am advised that Caranua's contribution to the rental cost of the premises will be in the region of €220,000 per annum (plus VAT), together with some €9,000 per annum for parking. I understand also that some fit-out works will also be required on the new premises.

Section 7(7) of Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 permits Caranua, from time to time as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions and with the approval of the Minister, to enter into contracts with persons and to engage consultants or advisers and any moneys payable as a result of this must be paid by Caranua out of moneys at their disposal. While Caranua has been in regular contact with my Department regarding its accommodation requirements and the necessity to move, it has not, at this time, submitted a contract in respect of its accommodation for the proposed new premises.

In conclusion, I should point out that Caranua's costs, including accommodation costs, must be met from the NTMA investment which is funded by religious contributions. This arises from the provision in section 30(1) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 which states that the "expenses and other costs incurred by the Agency under this Act shall, subject to the approval of the Board, be charged on the investment account to the benefit of the Agency". The Department's legal advice is that Caranua's costs, including accommodation costs, must be met from the NTMA investment account.

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund**

110. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he gave permission for contracts entered into by Caranua; if so, if he will provide details of the nature of the contracts in tabular form; when permission was given by him; the cost of each contract entered into by Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24876/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Since my appointment as Minister for Education and Skills in May 2016 I have not approved any proposals submitted by Caranua under section 7(7) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. Under that provision Caranua may, as it considers it necessary for the performance of its functions and with the approval of the Minister, enter into contracts with persons or to engage consultants or advisers. Details of approvals given by previous Ministers are set out in the tabular statement included in the response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question of today's date (PQ 24670/17).

### **Teachers' Panel Rights**



111. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) whereby due to an error in his Department's payroll system, a person has been left on point one on the pay scale, rather than point three at which they should be; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in view of this error the person has been precluded from getting onto the supplementary panel and therefore precluded from participation in job interviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24879/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The teacher referred to by the Deputy applied for access to the Supplementary Redeployment Panel.

Having reviewed his salary scale point and incremental date he should be on Point three of the Salary Scale w.e.f. from the 11/9/16 for supplementary panel purposes and Point three on the Salary Scale w.e.f. 11/12//16 for payroll purposes.

The person referred to is eligible for access to the supplementary panel and he has been notified of same. Arrears of salary will issue to him in the salary payment of 1 June.

### **Student Universal Support Ireland**

112. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a number of aspects of the current SUSI system including the current gross income threshold of €54,240; and if he will allow for household deductibles such as mortgage or rent to be included on a SUSI application. [24885/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally on the same basis to both employed and self-employed applicants. Gross income before the deduction of income tax or the universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded.

The assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. In recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may also be increased by up to €4,830 for each additional family member attending college at the same time. In this way, the Student Grant Scheme is responsive to the individual circumstances of particular families.

The current system of student supports is underpinned by the Student Support Act, 2011. My officials have recently commenced a review of this legislation to identify areas where the Act needs to be updated to reflect the changes that have taken place in Irish society and to ensure that supports are targeted effectively at those most in need. All relevant issues will be considered as part of this review.

### **International Summits**

113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his policy on attendance at and participation in the OECD's annual international summit on the teaching profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24921/17]

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

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

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

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

114. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there is a clear pay disparity between teachers recruited before 1 January 2011 and those recruited thereafter; his further views on whether it is unacceptable to maintain such pay disparities; his plans to address pay equality issues beyond the steps already agreed in relation to restoration of a qualification allowance payment; the cost of restoring teachers recruited since 1 January 2011 to the previous pay scale; the elements which make up this cost; and the number of teachers affected. [24922/17]

130. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there is a pay disparity between teachers recruited before 1 January 2011 and those recruited thereafter; his further views on whether it is unacceptable to maintain such pay disparities; his plans to address pay equality issues beyond the steps already agreed in relation to restoration of a qualification allowance payment; the cost of restoring teachers recruited since 1 January 2011 to the previous pay scale; the elements which make up this cost; and the number of teachers affected. [24938/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 130 together.

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

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

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers.

The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours.

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

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

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servants and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would also not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean that we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the recently published analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government established the Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of public service pay talks. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation and these discussions are now underway.

### **Legislative Process**

115. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the Technological Universities Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24923/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Programme for Gov-

ernment outlines that this Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities. This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030.

The third Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage. The Department on behalf of the Minister is conducting a series of consultations with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government.

As part of this process of consultation, Department officials have recently concluded their consultation with TUI on this matter. A final clarification document has been issued by the Department to the TUI on a range of issues including issues related to superannuation and terms and conditions. The Department understands that TUI will be putting this document to a ballot of their members in due course.

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

### **Ministerial Correspondence**

116. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the correspondence he has received from the chief executive of the Higher Education Authority regarding governance, human resources and financial practices in the University of Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24924/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The HEA wrote to my Department in October 2016 regarding the issues raised at UL. My Department and the HEA and the University of Limerick (UL) have engaged in ongoing discussions which have culminated in agreement being reached between all parties to conduct an independent review into the governance, HR and financial practices and procedures at the University.

This decision arises from a number of protected disclosures and other complaints received from current and former employees of the University. To date, there have been a number of steps taken to address the issues raised, including the Mazar's report whose recommendations the HEA have been working closely with UL to implement.

The independent review will address the issues raised and ensure that robust policies for the future are in place. The Department and the HEA have independently finalised the terms of reference for the review. The Department and the HEA has agreed that the HEA will oversee the review and the HEA have proceeded to appoint Mr Richard Thorn, President Emeritus of Sligo Institute of Technology, as the appropriate independent external reviewer to conduct the review.

It is expected that the final review will be completed and submitted to the HEA by 30th September 2017. In the event that it is not practicable to make a final report within this timeframe, an interim report will be provided.

### **Teacher Exchange Scheme**

117. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's

work on setting up a relocation panel for permanent primary school teachers who need to relocate but do not wish to resign their position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24925/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **English Language Training Organisations**

118. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of each accreditation and co-ordination of English language services and schools (details supplied) capacity which is left empty in order to assure they have enough capacity to honour ACELS-MEI's learner protection scheme should the need arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24926/17]

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

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



Statutory Declarations given by the providers.

Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) is a long established private association of English language schools. It is a condition of membership of MEI that a school holds ACELS recognition.

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

### **English Language Training Organisations**

119. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's role in the regulation of an association (details supplied) in particular the learner protection scheme of the association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24927/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) is a private association of English language schools and is not subject to regulation by my Department.

ACELS (the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services) is a voluntary national scheme responsible for the recognition and inspection of English language providers. It is administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. ACELS recognised providers are required to have protection for enrolled learner policies in place. ACELS recognition is a requirement for membership of MEI.

In addition, all English language providers which are listed on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes - the list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to students to live and work in Ireland - are required to have mandatory protection for enrolled learner policies in place. The ILEP is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department.

### **Quality and Qualifications Ireland Administration**

120. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the implementation of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 in particular his Department's engagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland regarding the implementation schedule for the international education mark, IEM; the status of its recruitment of inspectors for the IEM; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24928/17]

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

I published the General Scheme of the Bill on 15th May 2017, following approval by Government. The General Scheme of the Bill will now be submitted to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

It is anticipated that the IEM will be introduced in 2018.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**



121. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the up-take in the number of apprenticeships by females; his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24929/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** As the Deputy is aware, in order to be registered as an apprentice by SOLAS, a person must be employed by an approved employer in one of the craft trades. Recruitment to apprenticeship is therefore driven by employers rather than by SOLAS or by education and training providers.

The 2014 Review of Apprenticeship in Ireland acknowledged the number of women employed in craft apprenticeships has been low as these programmes operate in sectors that have traditionally low levels of female employment. While SOLAS offers a bursary to employers to encourage them to employ female apprentices, the number remains low.

Currently the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. The first of these new apprenticeships were launched in 2016, with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship getting underway in November. We have already seen an increase in female participation in these new programmes with almost 40% of the initial intake on the Insurance Practitioner programme being female. 13 further new apprenticeships will get underway in 2017, many of which are in sectors where there is a different gender balance in the workplace and I am confident, as these new apprenticeships are rolled out, that this will lead to a continued increase in female participation.

As set out in the recently published Action Plan to Extend Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, my Department will, in conjunction with SOLAS, review the pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of diverse groups, including female participation, in light of the broadening of the apprenticeship system into new areas. The review will be completed in 2018 and any recommendations made will be implemented immediately.

Recently, a digital campaign to promote apprenticeship got underway with a dedicated Twitter feed #Generation Apprenticeship, a new apprenticeship website, *www.apprenticeship.ie*, an Apprenticeship Ireland Facebook page and a LinkedIn page. In all aspects of the digital campaign women feature prominently and as the campaign rolls out, there will be a specific focus on encouraging women and girls to consider apprenticeship as a means of launching or developing their careers.

### School Patronage

122. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the Government reaching its target of 400 non-denominational and multidenominational schools by 2030; the number of such schools to be opened in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24930/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that I recently announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area. The Government's target of achieving 400 multi-denominational schools by 2030 is highly ambitious, requiring a significant increase in the rate of transfer of Catholic schools to multidenominational patrons.

The new process will involve the Education and Training Boards in the initial phase, as

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

Each ETB will then prepare a report for the Department outlining the levels of demand within their functional areas and the responses of the existing patrons as to how this might be accommodated through the reconfiguration of existing school provision.

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

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

As the Deputy will also be aware my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. Following patronage processes, which give significant weight to parental demand, the vast majority of new schools which are established come under multi-denominational patronage.

Since 2011, 31 new primary schools and 37 new post-primary schools have been, or are in the process of being, established.

All of the 31 primary schools are multi-denominational and 32 of the 37 post-primary schools are multi-denominational.

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

123. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which children under the new model for allocation of resource teaching hours in primary and secondary that received diagnoses in the school year 2016-2017 will receive resource teaching hours from September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24931/17]

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

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

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

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

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March.

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

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

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

The additional funding will provide additional supports to over 1200 schools who are identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model. Supports for children with special educational needs is a key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, who require such support.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are now published and available on the Departments website.

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

### **Digital Strategy for Schools**

124. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of information and communication technology grants his Department has paid to primary and secondary schools in the past 12 months; the details of the grants given to schools in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24932/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, sets out the Department's vision for embedding ICT in teaching learning and assessment in primary and post-primary schools. The Strategy recognises the issues schools face in relation to ICT infrastructure, and funding of €210m is committed to address these requirements over the period of the Strategy. The first tranche of funding of €30m in respect of the 2016-2017 school year has now been issued to 3,158 primary schools and 667 post-primary schools.

Details of the Grant Scheme for ICT Infrastructure, including eligibility criteria and the methodology applied to calculating the payments, can be found on the Department's website at [http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001\\_2017.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001_2017.pdf).

The rates payable are €2,000 per school plus €22.20 per mainstream pupil in primary schools, with additional per capita payments for pupils in DEIS schools, Special Classes and Special Schools. At post-primary, the rates payable are €2,000 per school plus €31.90 per stu-

dent, with an additional per capita payment for students in DEIS schools. The grant is worth approximately €4,000 for a 100 pupil school and approximately €13,000 (plus the lump sum) for a 500 pupil school at primary level. At post-primary level, the grant is worth circa €17,000 for a 500 student school, and some €33,000 for a 1,000 student school.

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

### **Garda Vetting Applications Data**

125. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers employed prior to 2007 who have registered for retrospective Garda vetting under the terms of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the Teaching Council Act 2001; the number of applications to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24933/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In April 2016 the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016. It put in place statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children or vulnerable persons, including requirements for the retrospective vetting of persons who have never previously been garda vetted.

In accordance with the relevant provisions of the Teaching Council Amendment Act 2015, the retrospective vetting of all registered teachers who have not been vetted to date is being conducted by the Teaching Council in the context of their annual renewal of registration.

From 2006 up to the introduction of statutory vetting in April 2016, almost 57,000 registered teachers were subjected to Garda vetting under the non-statutory arrangements either at point of first registration or where a teacher moved employment within the school system. At that time, circa 34,000 registered teachers had not yet been vetted. These were typically permanent teachers who were in the same school since the non-statutory vetting arrangements were introduced in 2006

At the beginning of 2017, the number of un-vetted registered teachers had reduced to approximately 32,500. In January 2017, the Council commenced its programme of retrospective vetting of un-vetted teachers in the context of their annual renewal of registration and to date has requested almost 8,000 teachers to apply for retrospective vetting. As the year progresses, the remaining un-vetted teachers will be requested by the Council to apply for vetting.

### **School Management**

126. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the model of leadership in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24934/17]

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

Budget 2016 provided 250 posts to second level schools to enable Deputy Principals to be more fully available to assist the school principal with the leadership of the school. At primary



level Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

127. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide primary and post-primary average class size figures for Ireland and other EU member states; his plans to tackle large class size concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24935/17]

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

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

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

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



Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the coming school year. The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

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

### **Commencement of Legislation**

128. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are remaining sections of the Teaching Council Act 2001 to be commenced; the timeframe for commencing such sections; and the number of fitness to teach complaints received and processed to date in 2017 since he commenced these provisions in July 2016. [24936/17]

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

I commenced the sections of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 relating to fitness to teach in July 2016. The Deputy will appreciate that the fitness to teach process is independent of my Department and she should contact the Council directly for information on the number of complaints received.

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

### **Third Level Funding**

129. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to deal with concerns regarding third level student support and funding challenges for third level institutions. [24937/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society. The package of measures we announced for the sector in last year's Budget reflects this priority.

I secured an initial investment of €36.5 million in the sector in this year's Budget and €160 million overall over the next three years. This is the first significant investment in the sector in 9 years – a period in which State investment in higher education fell by 33% (€463 million). This will allow us for the first time to keep pace with demographic increases and also introduce targeted initiatives in priority areas, in particular disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning, with thousands of students benefitting under each heading.

In addition, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently completing a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer invest-

ment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. The proposal under consultation seeks to deliver up to an additional €200m per annum by 2020 through an increase in the National Training Fund levy.

Meanwhile, to examine the proposals that can add to these two elements and put in place a sustainable system of funding that can deliver a world-class third level system for the medium and long term, in 2016 I published the Cassells report, and as committed to in the Programme for Government, that report is currently with the Oireachtas Committee.

This is an area where broad political consensus is needed on the future direction, and I will be working to build that consensus. The Funding Model review will compliment the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

In relation to student supports, my Department is investing in a significant programme of supports in order to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education.

In total my Department will invest approximately €450 million in access supports in the 2017/18 academic year. This will benefit approximately 80,000 disadvantaged students through the student grant scheme. Other measures include the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

*Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 114.*

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

131. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to issue a directive on implementing pay deductions for members of teacher unions that rejected working additional hours under the Croke Park Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24939/17]

143. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for equating newly qualified teachers since 2011 and those who entered the workforce before; if he will report on discussions with a group (details supplied) on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24952/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 143 together.

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

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

- The pay increases for 2012 new entrant teachers that are effective from 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018 do not apply;
- Increments are frozen until July 2018;
- Missing out on inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale – the first

24 May 2017

moiety of this due on 1 September 2016 (€796) has not been paid;

- The alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners has been withdrawn, meaning a further pay reduction of up to €1,769 per teacher;

- Non-application of the €1,000 increase being paid to public servants on 1 April 2017, as brought forward from 1 September 2017 under the LRA;

- The Ward Report measures have been withdrawn and the revised sequence for filling posts is not being applied – both of these would enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before;

- Promotion posts announced in Budget 2017 will not be available;

- The additional teacher allocation/reduction in class contact time from September 2017 for teachers with Junior Cycle classes will not apply;

- No S&S opt-out option;

- No S&S opt-in option;

- Missing out on chance to influence use of Croke Park hours through a review;

- Potential for job losses through compulsory redundancy;

- Withdrawal of enhanced redundancy payment where a teacher is made redundant;

- Potential delay or loss of the pay increase of €1,000 due on 1 September 2017 and the reversal of the pay reductions for higher earners due on 1 April 2017.

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

The proposals represented the final outcome of the process and there will be no further offer made to ASTI.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the recently published analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government established the Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the

issue further in the context of public service pay talks. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation and these discussions are now underway.

### **Junior Cycle Reform**

132. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the roll-out of the junior cycle reform process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24940/17]

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

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

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

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

### **Skills Shortages**

133. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the areas (details supplied) that have been highlighted as having skills shortages by the skills and labour market research unit; the way in which he plans to tackle these skills shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24941/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The education and training system at all levels has a number of strategies in place to ensure we meet existing and future skills needs identified by data from sources such as the SLMRU. Among those strategies are the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

The Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019 provides a key statement on the reform agenda across the education and training system. The Plan contains a range of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills needs, and continuous improvement within the education service. A key objective of this Plan is to address the identified skills needs across key priority sectors of the economy identified by the SLMRU. These sectors include financial

services, manufacturing and ICT, transport, business administration and many others.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 has over 120 Actions involving over 50 stakeholders, the purpose of the Strategy is to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Included in the actions in the Strategy is the creation of a new National Skills Council. The Council had its first meeting on the 15th May. The Council will oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of identified skills needs. Skills information from the EGFSN, the SLMRU and the Regional Skills Fora will feed into the work of the Council.

Within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, significant improvements have been made in the planning and funding of provision since the publication of the FET Strategy in 2014. Education and Training Boards engage in a service planning process annually against a range of detailed parameters set by SOLAS. This process has been refined and improved each year and includes the use of strengthened labour market data provided by the SLMRU to ensure that the skill needs of learners and enterprise are met.

In the Higher Education Sector, the primary objective of Springboard+ in 2017 is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy. including ICT; hospitality; biopharma, medical device technologies and manufacturing; financial services; and entrepreneurship. This year the eligibility criteria has been expanded to include homemakers and those in employment who wish to upskill or reskill in specific high demand skills areas ie Biopharma/Med-tech.

The Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 now sets out a clear pathway for developing new apprenticeships as well as targets for the development of new programmes. The Plan committed to a new call for proposals in 2017 to refresh the pipeline already established through the 2015 call, this second call for proposals was issued on 8 May. The Apprenticeship Council has prepared a handbook "Developing a National Apprenticeship" to accompany this second call. The plan also commits to examining the potential for public sector engagement with the apprenticeship system. The Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, the first of the new programmes developed through the Apprenticeship Council's first call for proposals, launched in September 2016 and an Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship commenced in November 2016. 13 further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including medical devices, polymer processing and financial services.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

134. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the suggestions by an organisation (details supplied) that related capital investment will be necessary if the programme for Government commitment on having schools available for child care services can be successfully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24942/17]

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

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



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

In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community, education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.

The provision of funding for childcare services is a matter for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. An interdepartmental group with senior officials from both my Department and from DCYA finalised an Action Plan for School age Childcare which was published in early March 2017. Under the plan, capital funding of €3m is being made available by DCYA to support increased capacity for the provision of school age childcare as well for improving the quality of the service provided by existing school age childcare services. A Working Group has also been established by DCYA to develop a comprehensive set of quality standards for school age childcare. The first meeting of the Working Group took place on 17 May 2017. The Action Plan is available on <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-School-Age-Childcare.pdf> .

### **Education Policy**

135. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he plans to progress the three areas in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus, including helping children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace; the reason he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24943/17]

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

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

The basic aim of this Government is to sustain our economic progress and use it to build a fair and compassionate society. Education is the best means of delivering a fairer society, breaking down cycles of disadvantage and ensuring that all our people, in particular those with special educational needs, are able to participate in that progress and fulfil their potential. Excellent and innovative education and training are the pivot around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation should revolve. It is central to sustaining economic success and in

converting economic success into building a strong community. Having the best education and training service in Europe will allow us to provide better opportunities for more people from disadvantaged groups, as well as ensuring that we create more sustainable well-paying jobs.

Our approach to special education has undergone a huge transformation with a growing proportion of children with special educational needs being educated with their peers in mainstream schools. The participation and progress of learners with special educational needs across the whole education system remains a key focus with an emphasis on improving whole-school and whole system approaches. The Action Plan 2017 sets out a range of measures which will be undertaken during this year. These include allocating teachers to schools under the new allocation model to support children with special educational needs, publishing the outcomes of a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, and consult with partners on the implementation of sections of the EPSEN Act and on the provision of services to children with Down Syndrome.

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

To become an innovation leader and to build a strong talent base, we as a nation must effectively engage with enterprise. We must work to address identified skills needs in critical areas, and recognise the shifting global economic and political climate in which services are delivered and jobs are created. Successful enterprise engagement is the foundation of much of the planned activity detailed in the Action Plan 2017. This includes driving the growth of traineeships and apprenticeships, ensuring the relevance of work placements and work-based projects, and increasing the diversity of opportunity in learning beyond school. To advance this agenda, together with Minister Halligan, I launched the National Skills Council and the Regional Skills Fora last month. The Council's members are from senior levels within the public and private sectors, and they will oversee research, advise on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and on addressing those needs, and have a key role in promoting and reporting on the responses of education and training providers to the identified needs. The nine Regional Skills Fora will provide a cohesive education-led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together in addressing the skills needs of their regions, help employers to better understand and access the full range of services available across the system, enhance links between education and training providers in planning and delivering programmes, reduce duplication and inform national funding decisions.

In order to ensure that progress is made in all of these areas, updated annual Action Plans will be published each year, detailing the actions that will be implemented during that year. As part of this process, actions will be monitored against published timelines and progress reports will be published on a quarterly basis. Recently, the 2016 End of Year Review and the 2017 Quarter 1 Progress Report were published. They are both available on the Department's website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)), with full details of the actions already achieved in these three important areas.

136. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage the review of the school support programme through the DEIS initiative is at; when this review will be completed and published; if he envisages changes to the funding or delivery model of the DEIS programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24944/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As I previously advised the Deputy on 28th February last, the review of DEIS has been completed and is available on my Department's website at the following link:

*<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Report.pdf>*

On 13th February, I published DEIS Plan 2017, which sets out my Department's renewed policy statement on educational disadvantage.

Building on the five key goals set out in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, the Key Goals we have set ourselves in this DEIS Plan are:

1. To implement more robust and responsive assessment framework for identification of schools and effective resource allocation
2. To improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools
3. To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage
4. To support and foster best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration
5. To support the work of schools by providing the research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan.

The DEIS Plan identifies more than 100 actions in support of the goals we have identified. These actions will ensure that the targets we have set will be achieved and learners most at risk of disadvantage will experience improved outcomes.

Those actions include the following:

- School leaders and teachers in DEIS schools will be prioritised for accessing professional leadership training, preparation courses for newly appointed principals, mentoring and coaching courses
- The connections between pre-schools and primary schools in communities will be strengthened
- Schools will be asked, in the annual review of their School Plan, to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific targets, including targets for literacy and numeracy, CPD and leadership and to evaluate these annually
- A pilot approach to identify effective interventions and explore how these and further creativity around teaching and learning, and the delivery of other supports have made effective use of the resources available to schools to achieve good educational outcomes will be adopted
- A new School Excellence Fund to support the implementation of new interventions and help broker the necessary resources from the various support agencies
- Greater prioritisation of NEPS service to DEIS schools.

The plan can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>

## School Curriculum

137. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide new courses in the leaving certificate such as coding, physical education and politics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24945/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

## School Management

138. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the moratorium on filling certain promoted posts in schools will be lifted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24946/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Budget 2016 provided 250 posts to second level schools to enable Deputy Principals to be more fully available to assist the

school principal with the leadership of the school. At primary level, Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Teachers’ Professional Development**

139. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which his Department supports teacher continuous professional development at primary and post-primary levels; the investment involved and this figure as a percentage of education spending overall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24947/17]

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

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

The spend of €46.5m includes all costs associated with the provision of CPD at primary and



post primary level funded by my Department.

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

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

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

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

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

140. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated time-frame for and cost of the Government's programme commitment to reducing the pupil-teacher ratio in junior and senior infants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24949/17]

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

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

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

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

The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the next school year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demo-

graphic need, curriculum reform, additional resource teaching posts and the strengthening of school leadership.

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

### **School Patronage**

141. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location of all schools under religious patronage which he expects to be divested in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24950/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I presume the Deputy meant to refer to 2017 in her question (Ref. No. 24950/17).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Postgraduate Enrolments**

142. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the restoration of postgraduate grants and their necessity to open up access to postgraduate studies and to ensure that a steady stream of persons achieve a postgraduate qualification for societal good and to ensure attractiveness to foreign investors. [24951/17]

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

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

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

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

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

*Question No. 143 answered with Question No. 131.*

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

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve access to special educational supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24953/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **School Funding**

145. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria used by his Department for deciding on applications for capital funding junior, senior and post-primary schools. [24954/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The delivery of school projects so that all schools in an area can between them cater for all students seeking a school place is the main focus of my Department capital budget. To this end, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses a range of data sources in carrying out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

My Department also prioritises projects that in addition to meeting increases in enrolments, have a major deficit of mainstream accommodation capacity for current enrolments, require major refurbishment and replacement of poor accommodation.

The Capital Programme further provides for devolved funding for smaller scale projects for schools, where an immediate accommodation requirement has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher. In that regard, it is open to schools to apply for funding for additional classroom accommodation, where required.

### **State Examinations Data**

146. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the reported failure rate at leaving certificate maths; his plans to remedy this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24955/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am taking it that the Deputy is referring to the combined numbers of Leaving Certificate Mathematics candidates at all three levels (Higher, Ordinary, and Foundation) who were awarded E grades, F grades or no grade in the 2016 State Examinations. The designation of any performance in the certificate examinations as a 'fail' ceased in 1968.

The nature of curricular examinations such as the Leaving Certificate and the procedures currently in place for awarding grades are such that a certain amount of fluctuation in the grade distribution from year to year is to be expected. Grade distributions are also affected significantly by the proportion of candidates who opt to take the examination at each level. In particular, if the proportion of candidates opting for Higher level increases, the candidates making this move will tend to be those who were towards the higher achieving end of the Ordinary level distribution and will tend to fall at the lower achieving end of the Higher level distribution. This will obviously affect the grade distribution at both levels. Influenced by the combined effect of syllabus change in mathematics, known as Project Maths, and the introduction by the Higher Education Institutions of 'bonus points' for Higher level mathematics, the number of students in recent years presenting for Higher level in Leaving Certificate Mathematics examinations has increased significantly, from 15.8% in 2011 to 28% in 2016.

During the standard-setting process that happens as part of the marking process each year, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) takes account of these and any other relevant factors in the course of satisfying itself that the distribution of grades awarded is appropriate and that it accurately reflects the performance of the candidates in comparison to the achievement standards envisaged when the syllabus was designed.

In the context of a significant migration of mathematics candidates from Ordinary to Higher level, it may be noted that a similar absolute number of candidates awarded E, F or no grade at Ordinary level will inevitably be manifested as a higher percentage, since the total number of candidates at this level has reduced.

The number of candidates who failed to achieve at least a D3 grade at any level of the mathematics examination in 2016, while marginally higher than in the last three or four years, is very similar to the number in the years before that (2009 to 2011, for example). In the context of the factors mentioned above, there is nothing especially unusual about the grade distribution in mathematics for 2016.

In the case of the current syllabus change in mathematics, there has been a deliberate attempt to increase the emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, including interpretation, problem solving, and dealing with the unfamiliar. These are skills that students find difficult to master and teachers find difficult to instil in students. The syllabus expectations are ambitious at all levels.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will be undertaking a review of the Project Maths initiative, now that the full implementation of all phases of the curricular change is complete. By this time, students will have been through the new mathematics cycle a few times and the NCCA will have good information on which to base the assessment of its impact, especially on the learning of under-achievers. I have asked the SEC to ensure that any lessons that can be learned from candidate performance in recent examinations, and the 2016 examination in particular, be fed into that review process. The Project Maths Implementation Support Group, an industry-education partnership set up by my Department, including third level bodies, Engineers Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, will also be able to provide their



considered opinions to this process.

### **Student Retention Rates**

147. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the drop-out rate in third-level institute of technology courses; his plans to remedy the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24956/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Higher Education Authority has recently published (April 2017) its latest Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education, which provides an analysis of data relating to non-progression of 2013/14 full-time undergraduate new entrants to HEA funded institutions. The study shows that the proportion of new entrants in 2013/14 who did not progress is 15% across all sectors and NFQ levels. This compares to 16% in 2012/13. The rates of non-progression vary within and between sectors.

Below average progression rates continue in the fields of Construction and Related, Services, Computer Science and Engineering with again variation between sectors and institutions. However, there is some improvement reported in progression rates for Computer Science with rates increasing from 80% to 84%. Institutes of technology rates have increased from 74% to 80% compared to universities from 85% to 88%. This would indicate that the funding made available for retention measures is having a positive impact.

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-19, is the national policy framework for promoting access to, and successful completion of, higher education for students from groups that are currently under-represented in higher education. The vision of the National Access Plan is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. The Plan contains 5 key goals and 28 actions that are scheduled for implementation in the period 2015 - 2019. One of the actions is to address non-completion among the student population with a particular emphasis on 'access' students.

This action is currently underway. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) have produced a discussion paper on the factors that contribute to 'student success'. A Working Group has also been established, which is chaired by the HEA, and which comprises representatives from across the higher education sector. The intention is to identify the type of strategies and measures that have been shown to be successful in different institutional contexts. The National Forum for the enhancement of Teaching and Learning is currently facilitating a focussed scoping exercise to inform the activities of the Working Group. The scoping exercise is being chaired by the Union of Students of Ireland. This will ensure that the student voice is central to this process. It is expected that the Working Group will produce its report by the end of 2017.

Furthermore, in 2013, Ireland launched its first Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) to take the views of students into account, particularly when looking at rates of non-progression. The results of the ISSE survey will continue to guide future policy decisions on retention across all years of higher education.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

148. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the lack of apprenticeships suitable for a number of employment vacancies such as chefs and in the hospitality sector generally in order to upskill young persons; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [24957/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** In January of this year, I launched the Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, setting out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Programme for Government commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period to 2020. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals in 2015 along with a commitment to launch a second call for new apprenticeship proposals. Over the lifetime of the Action Plan, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes representing a doubling of current activity.

Work on the development of a new Commis Chef Apprenticeship led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry Education and Training Board is at an advanced stage with programme commencement scheduled for later this year.

The Apprenticeship Council has approved development funding for a separate proposal to develop a Chef de Partie Apprenticeship and will continue to work with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them into sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. The funding for planned and forecast expansion in 2017 will see an additional €20 million provided.

A key commitment in the Action Plan for this year was the issue of a second call to employers for proposals for new apprenticeships which took place earlier this month and will remain open until 1st September 2017. It is now open to all sectors, including the hospitality sector, to submit proposals for new apprenticeship programmes to provide for the skill needs of their sectors. Information and supporting documentation on the second call is available at the new apprenticeship website [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie)

### **Third Level Funding**

149. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has read a position paper (details supplied) on the funding of higher education regarding the effects a loan scheme would have on students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24958/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am aware of the USI pre-budget submission and its recommendations for increased funding to the sector. The report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education sets out a number of funding options for the sector with income contingent loans being just one of those options. Other options include a predominantly State-funded system or a State-funded system supplemented with continuing student fees. The Report is currently with the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration where each of the funding models will be examined and the process will include input from all stakeholders. I understand the Union of Students in Ireland are one of the groups who have made a submission.

Following on from the report as the Minister for Education and Skills I have already acted to secure increased funding in Budget 2017 of €36.5m for higher education and to make further provision in the Department's expenditure ceiling for 2018 and 2019, which, cumulatively, represents an additional €160m investment by the Exchequer in higher education in the period 2017 – 2018.

In addition, the Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently completing a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer invest-

ment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. The proposal under consultation seeks to deliver up to an additional €200m per annum by 2020 through an increase in the National Training Fund levy.

Moreover, as I have stated previously appropriate technical work will be undertaken, including the examination of relevant literature of which there is a wide range, in relation to the option set out in the Expert Group report on deferred payment of student fees through income contingent student loan schemes. The aim of such technical work is to inform future policy options including in the light of recommendations from the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills.

This comprehensive approach is being taken in order to contribute to the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the sector. As such, it will be important to build broad political and societal consensus on achieving the most appropriate future funding model and my Department and I continue to work to that end.

### **Teacher Data**

150. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the shortage of substitute teachers for primary schools and the serious difficulties this is causing for school principals and managers throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24959/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In overall terms my Department does not have evidence of a recent or current general shortage of primary teachers, including for substitute positions. However, I am aware that some schools are experiencing difficulty in recruiting substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The aim of my Department's policy is to achieve a balance between the supply of, and demand for, teachers. The Deputy will be aware of the report of the Technical Working Group (TWG) which was set up by the Teaching Council to formulate advice on teacher supply.

The TWG's report sets out an approach to planning which scopes out the work necessary to develop a model for teacher supply in the medium to long term. Officials in my Department have been giving further consideration to the short term measures that might be implemented to increase the supply of teachers and I intend to publish the report shortly and to confirm these short term measures, including the employment by schools of retired teachers and an increase in the number of days per school year that a teacher on career break may work as a substitute.

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

151. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24960/17]

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

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

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

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

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March.

In relation to the school referred to by the Deputy, this school received a special education teaching allocation for September 2017 of 42.05 hours. As the school profile did not indicate a requirement for an additional allocation, the allocation received is equivalent to the allocation the school received for the 2016/17 school year.

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

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

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

The additional funding will provide additional supports to over 1200 schools who are identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model. Supports for children with special educational needs is a key priority for this Government. The new funding will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils, including pupils who have yet to enrol in their school, who require such support.

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

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

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

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for

whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs are now published and available on the Departments website.

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

In relation to the matter raised by the school with regards to an application for an additional mainstream teacher, Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) provides details of how a school may apply for an additional mainstream staffing post on the basis that they are a developing school, or have projected increased enrolments, and the criteria for qualification under this process.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location a school (details supplied) currently in temporary accommodation in Cork city will be located for the 2017/2018 school year; the position regarding the provision of a permanent site for the



school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24970/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The school to which the Deputy refers was established in 2016. It is currently operating from part of Nagle Community College, Mahon, Blackrock, Co. Cork. An extension of this arrangement was recently agreed with the school authority pending the delivery of alternative temporary accommodation which is being arranged by the school's patron body.

With respect to the permanent accommodation for the school in question, officials in my Department have engaged with officials in Cork County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of schools sites with a view to identifying and acquiring a suitable permanent site to accommodate the school.

A number of site options were identified and a comprehensive technical assessment of feasibility was undertaken on all. A suitable site option on the Old Carrigaline Road, close to Douglas Garda Station has been identified and the acquisition process in respect of this is at an advanced stage.

Officials in my Department continue to work with Cork County Council in the context of the Draft Ballincollig Carrigaline Local Area Plan with respect to the potential development of the site in question.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

153. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding new classrooms and school development for a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that the project has gone through the planning process and the tendering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25000/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The delivery of the Additional Accommodation Project referred to by the Deputy has been devolved to Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board (ETB).

As the Deputy is aware tenders have been received and the ETB have sought significant additional funding. To enable my Department's Planning and Building Unit considered the request for additional funding the ETB have been requested to submit further information.

As soon as this information is received and considered the ETB will be informed of the outcome.

### **School Guidance Counsellors**

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve the career guidance service throughout second level education; if he anticipates improvement in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25002/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 has a specific action to enhance guidance counselling at second-level as resources permit. A significant move was made in the 2016/17 school year with the restoration of half of the cut in provision for guidance counselling. This was equivalent to the restoration of 300 posts.

The allocation of a whole time equivalent of an additional 100 teachers to second level schools in Budget 2017 is a restoration of a further 16% of the teaching resources that were removed.

The delivery of this 16% restoration in addition to the 50% restoration in Budget 2016, means that two thirds of the Guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012 will be restored in our schools with effect from September 2017.

The 400 posts will be provided in respect of Guidance as a separate allocation on school's staffing schedules from September 2017. The guidance allocation shown separately on the staffing schedules represents 0.4 of the PTR for each school. DEIS schools will have a guidance allocation of 1.15 of the PTR which represents the total guidance allocation that was restored to these schools.

I will continue to consider further restorations in future Budgets.

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

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which persons with autism continue to have ready access to primary and second level school places throughout County Kildare; the extent to which difficulties have arisen in meeting the ongoing requirements in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25003/17]

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate school places are available at primary and second level for children with autism throughout the various schools in north Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25008/17]

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of special needs teachers and special needs assistants to meet requirements at primary and second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25011/17]

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate resource teachers remain available throughout all schools in north Kildare; his plans for augmentation in specific areas of particular need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25013/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 155, 160, 163 and 165 together.

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

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

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

This year, 13,015 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary

and post primary schools to the end of the 2016/17 school year, which is an increase of almost 23% in the number of posts available since 2011. The demand for 2017/18 will not be known until the NCSE application process is complete.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1153 across the country in 2016/17, of which 888 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

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

With regard to Kildare, in particular, there are 942 students with ASD attending schools in the County. Of these, 520 students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including Resource teaching and SNA support. 322 students are attending 59 ASD special classes, including 6 Early Intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes. A further 100 students with ASD are placed in 4 special schools in the county. The number of ASD classes has increased in the area by 24% since the 2013/14 school year.

The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish 1 new ASD class at primary level and 2 new ASD classes at post-primary level in Co. Kildare for the 2017/18 school year.

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

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

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

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

Further details on special classes, resource teaching and SNA allocations are available on the NCSE's website at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **School Playgrounds**

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if financial assistance will be provided towards the resurfacing of a playground in the case of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25004/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 10 application from the school in question to upgrade its play area under the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) (2016-2017).

The Deputy will be aware that I announced details of the successful applicants under round two of the SWS (2016-2017) for Categories 3 - 6, on the 3rd May last, details of which are published on my Department's website, [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Funding of €47 million is being made available for vital school projects in school buildings; 438 schools nationwide will benefit from this announcement. In total, funding of almost €80 million has now been approved in respect of 635 schools for Categories 1 to 6 under the multi-annual Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017). Nearly 50% of all schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants, in respect of Categories 1 to 6 can be accessed on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Assessment of valid projects in further categories will be considered in due course, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's web-

site. The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

In the meantime, it is open to the school to use its Minor Works Grant to undertake interim works to the school yard should it consider the works to be a priority.

### **School Transport Review**

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when it is expected a review of the school transport system is likely to be undertaken with particular reference to the objective of the streamlining of school transport in rural areas in which persons have been greatly inconvenienced by changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25005/17]

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

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

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

Under the terms of this Scheme in general children are eligible for transport where they meet the requisite distance and are attending their nearest school or education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Changes to the eligibility criteria for my Department's School Transport Scheme were announced in December 2010 by the then Government as part of measures contained in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations contained in the Value for Money review of the scheme.

The school transport approach compliments the overall Department policy which is to ensure that specific school accommodation needs for defined geographical areas are addressed in an orderly fashion.

Children who had an eligibility for school transport prior to the introduction of these changes retain this eligibility for the duration of their post primary school education provided there is no change in their circumstances though siblings applying for school transport from 2012 onwards are subject to the revised eligibility criteria.

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

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

With regard to the charges for concessionary school transport the recommended course of action was to continue with the current position whereby charges remain in place for those in receipt of concessionary places. I agree with this recommendation on the basis that those ap-



plying for concessionary transport are making a conscious decision to do so and understand the implications of this choice at the time of application.

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

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

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which new primary and second level teaching posts have been approved in respect of primary and second level schools throughout the country; the extent to which this is expected to favourably impact teaching conditions in the schools in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25006/17]

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the pupil-teacher ratio at primary and second level throughout the country is a matter of concern; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve the situation in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25015/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take questions Nos. 158 and 167 together.

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

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

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

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools in the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the coming school year.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

### **Schools Building Projects Administration**

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has received communication from the various primary school authorities throughout

north Kildare in the context of the provision of new buildings or extra facilities to meet requirements; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to respond in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25007/17]

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme at primary and second level in County Kildare continues to proceed as planned having particular regard to the urgent requirement of school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25009/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 161 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of the 29 school building projects in County Kildare that are included on my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme is outlined in the table.

My Department's 6 Year Capital Programme prioritises building projects for areas where significant additional school places are required. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of such funding approved in all schools, including those in County Kildare, is available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) which is updated regularly.

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 Padraig, 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

*Questions - Written Answers*

County	Roll No	School Name	School type	Status
Kildare	19796C	St Patrick's NS, Clane	Primary	Stage 2B
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

*Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 155.*

*Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 159.*

### **School Patronage**

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure the future of smaller rural denominational schools, the ethos of which may come under threat notwithstanding previous undertakings provided to minority religions and since the foundation of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25010/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is very aware of the importance of small schools to rural communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities.

To sustain primary schools in these communities my Department has a more favourable staffing schedule for small schools that are more than 8km distant from the next nearest school of the same type of patronage and language of instruction. This measure is designed to provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools.

With regard to school ethos, the government supports the concept of parental choice in our school system, whether that be a choice for denominational or multi-denominational education.

In regard to retaining small schools, a specific commitment is given in the Programme for a Partnership Government not to close any small school without the consent of parents. I am mindful of the concerns of small schools and will take these into account in considering any planning for future provision.

*Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 155.*

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects the education system at all levels to be in a position to meet the skills demand in the workplace; the extent to which apprenticeships are likely to impact on the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25012/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The education and training system at all levels has a number of strategies in place to ensure we meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace. Among those strategies are the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

The Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019 provides a key statement on the reform agenda across the education and training system. The Plan contains a range of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills needs, and continuous improvement within the education service.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 has over 120 Actions involving over 50 stakeholders, the purpose of the Strategy is to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Included in the actions in the Strategy is the creation of a new National Skills Council. The Council had its first meeting on the 15th May. The Council will oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of identified skills needs. Skills information from the EGFSN, the SLMRU and the Regional Skills Fora will feed into the work of the Council.

Within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, significant improvements have been made in the planning and funding of provision since the publication of the FET Strategy in 2014. Education and Training Boards engage in a service planning process annually against a range of detailed parameters set by SOLAS. This process has been refined and improved each year and includes the use of strengthened labour market data provided by the SLMRU to ensure that the skill needs of learners and enterprise are met.

In the Higher Education Sector, the primary objective of Springboard+ in 2017 is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy, including ICT; hospitality; biopharma, medical device technologies and manufacturing; financial services; and entrepreneurship. This year the eligibility criteria has been expanded to include homemakers and those in employment who wish to upskill or reskill in specific high demand skills areas, that is, Biopharma/Med-tech.

The Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 now sets out a clear pathway for developing new apprenticeships as well as targets for the development of new programmes. The Plan committed to a new call for proposals in 2017 to refresh the pipeline already established through the 2015 call, this second call for proposals was issued

on 8 May. The Apprenticeship Council has prepared a handbook “Developing a National Apprenticeship” to accompany this second call. The plan also commits to examining the potential for public sector engagement with the apprenticeship system. The Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, the first of the new programmes developed through the Apprenticeship Council’s first call for proposals, launched in September 2016 and an Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship commenced in November 2016. 13 further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including medical devices, polymer processing and financial services.

*Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 155.*

### **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which speech and language therapy continues to be available to persons with a specific requirement in Kildare north; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25014/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Speech and Language Therapy Services are under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health and the service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to introduce a new in-school Speech and Language Therapy service, creating stronger linkages between parents, teachers and Speech and Language Therapists. The programme also commits to bring the number of Speech and Language Therapists up to 1,102 (a 25% increase).

The Programme for a Partnership Government also contains a commitment to examine the adequacy of present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

Officials at my Department are currently engaging with colleagues in the Department of Health and the HSE to develop a plan for the implementation of this commitment. The implementation plan will identify the actions to be taken and the specific timeframe for the delivery of this commitment.

As the Deputy’s question is a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE), it should be referred to the Department of Health for direct reply.

My Department continues to provide an extensive range of special educational supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD). This includes provision for the establishment of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools.

Applications to establish such classes are considered by the school’s assigned Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and those meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The criteria for enrolment in a Special Class for pupils with SSLD is set out in my Department’s Circular 0038/2007.

Speech and Language Therapy services are provided to these classes by the Health Service Executive (HSE). An Admissions & Discharges Committee, comprising the Speech and Language Therapy Manager, Speech and Language Therapist, Class Teacher and Principal oversee the allocation of placements to a SSLD class. Classes operate with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 7:1 and eligible pupils may spend up to two years in such classes. In general, children



who meet the criteria for enrolment in special classes for pupils with SSLD are eligible for free transport to the SSLD class nearest to his or her place of residence, subject to the terms of the school transport scheme.

Pupils not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the criteria for Specific Speech and Language Disorder, as outlined in my Department's Circular, may qualify for additional teaching support under the School's Special Education Teaching Support provision, where he/she is enrolled in a mainstream school.

As such, pupils with Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) may attend a local school with additional teaching supports with speech & language therapy provided through the HSE primary care service, or attend a special class for pupils with SSLD, with speech and language therapy services provided in class by the HSE.

Pupils with mild speech and language difficulties may qualify for supplementary teaching support from within the school's special education teaching support. It is a matter for individual schools to use their professional judgement to identify pupils who will receive this support and to use the resources available to the school to intervene at the appropriate level with such pupils.

*Question No. 167 answered with Question No. 158.*

### **Planning Issues**

168. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 22 acres of land which was a flood plain was rezoned for housing (details supplied) in Bettystown, County Meath, in 2005. [24832/17]

169. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the mechanisms in place for the residents of a development (details supplied) should they be victims in the event of flooding, in view of the fact that the land was rezoned and planning permission was granted for the construction of the development. [24833/17]

170. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there are avenues open for recompense for residents of adjacent housing that experience an increase in flooding due to the construction of a development (details supplied). [24835/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 to 170, inclusive, together.

The decision as to whether to grant planning permission in any particular case is a matter for the relevant planning authority in the first instance and for An Bord Pleanála in the event of an appeal.

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 development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including current guidelines issued by my Department under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

In November 2009, my Department issued Guidelines for Planning Authorities on the Plan-

ning System and Flood Risk Management which are aimed at ensuring a more consistent, rigorous and systematic approach to flood risk identification, assessment and management within the planning system. These Guidelines provide, inter alia, that development in areas at risk of flooding, particularly flood plains, should be avoided, unless there are wider sustainability grounds that justify appropriate development and where the risk can be reduced or managed to an acceptable level. The Guidelines were issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to them in the performance of their functions.

With regard to the Deputy's question, Meath County Council has indicated that an objective to develop the lands in question for housing was included in the East Meath Local Area Plan in 2005. Moreover, when residential development of the subject lands was initially approved in 2009, a site specific flood risk assessment was submitted, which concluded that the proposed development was not deemed to be at significant risk of flooding from the adjacent river catchment or any of its tributaries. This assessment was fully considered by the planning authority, whose decision would have been open to full public scrutiny.

### **Pyrite Issues**

171. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of pyrite free green certificates that have been issued in the past five years by area in tabular form. [24849/17]

172. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons identified with grade 1 pyrite that changed to grade 2 in 2016. [24850/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board, with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a remedial works scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope to dwellings, which have significant damage attributable to pyritic heave.

All works under the pyrite remediation scheme are completed to the requirements of I.S. 398-2:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 2: Methodology for remediation works by competent builders and are overseen by design professionals in accordance with the requirements of the Board and the Housing Agency.

At the end of the remediation works, each dwelling is provided with a Certificate of Remediation for Reactive Pyrite in Sub-floor Hardcore Material, which is completed jointly by the relevant builder and the design professional in accordance with Annex B to I.S. 398-2:2013. The certificate confirms that the dwelling has been remediated to the requirements set out in the national standard. A total of 701 dwellings have been completed under the scheme to date and are in the process of receiving certificates of remediation. Where a certificate of remediation has been provided in respect of a dwelling, a green certificate would be neither applicable nor required.

Neither the Pyrite Resolution Board nor the Housing Agency issue green certificates under the pyrite remediation scheme; green certificates relate to the testing of the subfloor hardcore material of dwellings in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hard-

core material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. A green certificate is issued by a competent professional in respect of a dwelling where the hardcore is classified as Category A (negligible risk) and is shown not to be susceptible to expansion. Where a homeowner wishes to carry out testing on a dwelling in order to confirm the presence or otherwise of reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore material, the standard provides an objective, reliable and robust means by which such a dwelling can be tested and categorised by the homeowner.

With regard to the issue of properties with a Damage Condition Rating of 1, the Board is aware that 11 dwellings, which had a Damage Condition Rating of 1 when their building condition assessments were first completed, and which were refused under the scheme, have now progressed to a Damage Condition Rating of 2; these dwellings have now been included in the pyrite remediation scheme following the submission of new applications.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

173. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the annual capital investment spent on wastewater treatment from 2000 to 2021 in tabular form; and the figure for the portion of this investment each year targeted at those agglomerations listed by the European Commission in its urban wastewater directive infringement proceedings from 2013, including the 38 currently with the ECJ. [24918/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The annual capital investment by my Department on waste water infrastructure from 2000 to 2013 is outlined in the following table. This represents the expenditure by the Department on the provision of waste water infrastructure through the Water Services Investment Programme. In line with policy for cost recovery for the provision of water services for non-domestic users, the relevant water authorities would have provided capital investment to meet the proportion of the costs related to those users. In general this would have been 20%-25% of total costs depending on the ratio of domestic to non-domestic demand driving the need for investment.

Year	Water Services Investment Programme - Capital Investment in waste water infrastructure for 2000-2013 (€m)
2000	295
2001	376
2002	351
2003	285
2004	230
2005	209
2006	239
2007	255
2008	240
2009	255
2010	284
2011	220
2012	150
2013	124
Total	3,513

In addition, local authorities spent in the region of €4m to €10m per annum on smaller sewerage schemes, but these were largely for reasons of economic development.

The information requested with regard to the levels of capital investment each year in relevant agglomerations is not readily available. However, the data will be examined further and my Department will follow up with the Deputy if it is possible to provide relevant information.

Since January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of public water and waste water services. Capital investment in waste water treatment infrastructure for the period 2014-2016 has been approved by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the figures below for those years have been provided by Irish Water. The figures provided do not include significant metering, suppressed maintenance and reactive maintenance costs. The figures are also exclusive of non-network costs which include establishment, IT and facilities costs.

Year	Capital investment in waste water infrastructure (€m 2014 in 2014 prices, 2015 & 2016 in 2015 prices)
2014	150
2015	168
2016 (provisional)	199

The following table provides projected waste water capital expenditure as set out in the Irish Water Capital Investment Plan for the period 2017-2021. Again these figures are exclusive of non-network costs and they do not account for efficiency challenges to be set by CER.

Year	Projected capital investment in waste water infrastructure (€m 2015 prices)
2017	229
2018	318
2019	392
2020	403
2021	363

With regard to the level of investment required to achieve compliance in the 38 agglomerations cited, I am informed by Irish Water that the total projected capital investment in waste water infrastructure at these 38 agglomerations, for the period 2014 until full compliance is achieved, is now estimated to be in the region of €1.1 billion. However, this remains subject to change as projects are fully designed, tendered and delivered – and as issues with regard to sewer networks are better understood.

With regard to the information requested on agglomeration specific projected costs for the period 2014-2021, I understand that Irish Water are preparing material for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and that this information will include agglomeration specific projected costs.

### **Animal Breeding Regulations**

174. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether Ireland is not proactive enough in protecting animals in regard to dog breeding establishments. [24974/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The regulation of dog breeding establishments is a

matter for local authorities in accordance with the Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010. Each local authority must maintain for public inspection a register of dog breeding establishments in its functional area, which must include the name and address of the applicant seeking entry onto the register, the address of the dog breeding establishment and the maximum number of breeding bitches that may be kept at the dog breeding establishment or premises.

The Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010 provides a robust regulatory framework for, inter alia, the licensing, monitoring and inspection of dog breeding establishments by local authorities and, where a serious and immediate threat exists to public health or animal health and welfare, for the closure of such establishments.

A joint inspection regime of dog breeding establishments, involving the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Local Authority Veterinary Service, was inaugurated in 2015 for the purpose of inspection and follow up action. The discovery of individual problematic dog breeding establishments, and the taking of action by the Gardaí, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and local authorities in an integrated manner in the most serious cases, is a matter for the enforcement authorities concerned.

In late 2015, my Department agreed to begin a process of review of the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, under the auspices of the County and City Management Association Dogs Working Group. The work undertaken to date has been to produce a first draft revision of the Guidelines.

It was considered it essential to broaden the review of the Guidelines to a more formal public consultation, both for quality assurance and to address the need for openness and inclusiveness. A wide-scale formal public consultative process commenced on 1 December 2016 and closed on 28 February 2017. My Department is currently reviewing the feedback and data received through the process before submitting the findings to me.

More generally, the enforcement of welfare standards regarding all animals is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

## **Air and Water Pollution**

175. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the procedures in place regarding oversight of work at the Poolbeg incinerator to record and detect level of pollutants leaking into the River Liffey. [24981/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** While neither I nor my Department have any direct role in overseeing the operation of the incinerator at Poolbeg, the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 and 1990 carry a general prohibition on the entry of any polluting matter to waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the statutory body for investigating complaints of pollution and for the enforcement, both directly and through oversight of local authorities, of environmental legislation in Ireland.

Operation of the Poolbeg Incinerator is subject to the conditions of the Industrial Emissions Licence issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (Register. No. W0232-01). The licence sets strict conditions and emission limit values to ensure that operation of the activity will not pose a risk to human health or the environment. The EPA is responsible for enforcing the conditions of the licence and I understand that EPA inspectors have been visiting the site regularly in recent months to ensure that all the necessary licence requirements are in place.



I also understand that Dublin Waste to Energy Ltd is required to undertake a rigorous test programme to demonstrate that all abatement and monitoring equipment is operating correctly and that the plant is operating in compliance with the Emission Limit Values (ELVs) specified in the licence. Dublin Waste to Energy Ltd is also required to establish and maintain a public awareness and communications programme to ensure that members of the public can obtain information at the facility concerning its environmental performance. The licensee is also required to make monitoring data available on-line; this will include real-time and summary emissions monitoring data.

### **Foreshore Licence Applications**

176. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when a decision will be made on an application which was submitted to his Department by Galway City Council in September 2016 for a foreshore licence for the provision of the Sáilín to Silverstrand coastal protection works and greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24990/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The detail of this application was provided to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs as part of the prescribed body consultee process which all foreshore applications are subject to. On foot of concerns raised by the NPWS in relation to the proposed development, as outlined in the application, I requested in 2016 that Galway City Council prepare and submit a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) for this project. The NIS which comprises 150 pages (report and appendices) was submitted in September 2016. The NIS and the observations from the National Parks and Wildlife Service relating to the NIS are under consideration in my Department at present.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time on an application that will come before me for determination.

### **Local Authority Staff Data**

177. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of planners employed by the relevant local authorities in counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary and Clare respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24992/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered does not provide detail in respect of the number of planners employed by the relevant local authorities in counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary and Clare and accordingly the information requested is not available in my Department.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to recruit and assign staff to specific functional areas.

### **Planning Issues**

178. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of planning applications for individual houses that have been refused on the basis of house design in 2016 in counties Cork, Kerry and Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24993/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>.

These statistics include data in respect of each planning authority on the number and percentage of decisions to grant or refuse permission. However, the statistics gathered do not include information on reasons for refusal, as referred to by the Deputy.

### Planning Issues

179. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the options open to owners of sandpits who did not engage with their local authorities during the substitute consent period arising from the Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2012 but are now trying to apply for planning permission for reinstatement of their sandpits without success; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25044/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The July 2008 Judgment of the European Court of the Justice (ECJ) in case C-215/06 found that provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) which permitted applications for planning permission to retain existing developments requiring environmental impact assessment (EIA) or appropriate assessment, were contrary to EU law. However, the Judgment recognised that EU law cannot preclude national rules providing for the regularisation of developments in exceptional circumstances, provided that this does not facilitate the evasion of EU requirements.

The 2000 Act was amended in 2010 to bring the provisions relating to planning applications for retention of certain development into line with the ECJ Judgment. In addition, section 261A was inserted into the 2000 Act in 2010, requiring each planning authority to examine all existing quarries in its functional area during a 9-month period to determine whether EIA, a screening for EIA or an appropriate assessment should have been, but was not, carried out. Where a planning authority determined that a quarry came within this category, the authority was required to make a further decision in relation to the quarry's planning status, including its registration status. Following from this, the planning authority had to either direct the quarry operator to apply to An Bórd Pleanála for substitute consent for the quarry under a new Part XA of the 2000 Act or take enforcement action requiring the quarry to cease operations.

In the case where a quarry has ceased operations following enforcement action, it is open to the quarry operator to consider seeking leave from the Board under section 177C to apply for substitute consent for the development under Part XA of the 2000 Act. Section 177C relates to existing or ongoing development generally and enables leave to be sought to apply for substitute consent where, among other situations, the applicant is of the opinion that, having regard to exceptional circumstances, such an application may be appropriate to permit the regularisation of the development. Section 177D(2) of the 2000 Act sets out the matters to which the Board must have regard in considering whether exceptional circumstances exist.

The substitute consent process under Part XA of the 2000 Act involves the preparation of a remedial environmental impact statement or a remedial Natura impact statement, or both as appropriate, stating the significant effects of the development on the environment or the European site concerned, the remedial or mitigation measures taken or proposed to be taken in relation to those effects and a timescale for the taking of such proposed measures.

### **Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund**

180. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the proposed Drogheda northern cross route; if the plans have been amended recently due to the closure of Laurence's Gate to traffic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25047/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I presume the Deputy is enquiring about the application for funding by Louth County Council for the above project under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), which is aimed at relieving critical infrastructural blockages in order to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites in urban areas with high demand for housing.

A LIHAF call for proposals was issued to all local authorities in August 2016. It was open to all local authorities to apply for funding towards the capital cost of public infrastructure, which, when provided, would secure the early delivery of additional housing at considerable scale and more affordable price points, with developments in excess of 500 units in the Dublin area, or in excess of 200 units in areas outside Dublin.

21 local authorities submitted a total of 74 proposals in October 2016. On 28 March 2017, I announced funding for 34 projects under LIHAF. The total cost of these projects is €226.46 million, of which €169.65 million is to be funded under LIHAF with local authorities funding the remaining €56.81 million. These public infrastructure projects will be key to the delivery of 23,000 housing units over the next four years, with a longer term projection of up to 70,000 units as the selected sites are fully built out.

Louth County Council submitted three projects for consideration under LIHAF funding. LIHAF funding was approved for an access road in Newtown, Drogheda in the amount of €1.22m and an access road in Mount Avenue, Dundalk in the amount of €3.3m. However, while the Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR) in Drogheda was one of a number of proposals that merited funding, it was not possible to include the project in the March 2017 approvals, within the level of funding available. Qualifying proposals such as this one may be re-considered for LIHAF funding in the event that an approved proposal does not proceed or that additional LIHAF funding becomes available.

I understand from Louth County Council that the plans for the Port Access Northern Cross Route are not affected by the recent decision of Drogheda Municipal District elected members to agree to the closure of St. Laurence's Gate to vehicular traffic. The Council has advised that the PANCR remains a priority project and a number of housing projects which are ready to progress in that area require the upgrading of the road infrastructure. The Council is currently examining options open to it to deliver the required infrastructure on a phased basis.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

181. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he will publish the new wind energy guidelines.. [21870/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government(Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since May 2016, I have been liaising closely with my colleague Minister Naughten, having regard to his responsibility for renewable energy policy, on the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines relating to noise, setback distance and shadow flicker, recognising the need to bring the review to a close and provide certainty on the matter to all stakeholders, local authorities, the energy sector and the wider community.

In light of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to finalise the Guidelines and ongoing policy and legal developments in this area, my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, is continuing to advance work on the Guidelines and related matters in order to bring the various issues to a conclusion as early as possible.

Both Minister Naughten and I intend to provide a detailed update to the Government in the next few weeks, after which time I will be in a position to make a statement on the matter, outlining the proposed revisions to the Guidelines and the timelines for implementation of the various elements shortly.

It is important to mention that as part of the overall review, and having regard to the recent ECJ Judgement in a case relating to the Belgian/Wallonian wind energy guidelines, it is proposed to undertake a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the proposed revisions to the 2006 Guidelines before they come into effect. This is in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

In light of the SEA requirement, it is likely that while the proposals for revisions to the Guidelines will be available shortly, the Guidelines will not be finalised and come into effect until early 2018. In the meantime, the current Guidelines remain in force.

When finalised, revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

### **Departmental Legal Costs**

182. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will request the Office of the Chief State Solicitor to provide details of the spend by that office from initiation up to and including the European Court of Justice and to whom they were payable in a case (details supplied) arising from an investigation of complaints under Directive 2008/94/EC on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer and the resultant contractual obligations that derive under the transposition of that directive by the Government. [24840/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Chief State Solicitors Office has provided the following details of its expenditure on the case referred to by the Deputy.

Brian Murray SC	€90,558.30
Eoin Carolan BL	€82,480.74
Maurice Collins SC	€64,993.54
Nathan Reilly BL	€15,277.46
Stenographers fees	€2,021.42
Foreign Travel	€1,174.82
Travel	€1,195.58
General Law Expenses ( Legal costs accountants)	€1,753.98
Total	€259,455.84

The plaintiffs have delivered a Bill of Costs which is being dealt with by the State Claims Agency.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if financial assistance will be given in the case of a person (details supplied) who submitted their required documentation in respect of a funeral; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24843/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. ENPs are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

The person concerned made an application for an ENP in respect of funeral expenses. In order to determine her entitlement to this payment, she has been requested to produce certain documentation in support of her application. When this information is received a decision on her application will be immediately made.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Appeals Status

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) for disability allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24845/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 6th December 2016. However the Oral Hearing was adjourned as all parties wished to submit more documents in support of the appeal.

I understand that a Freedom of Information request has been submitted by the person concerned and a response is currently being prepared. As soon as the response has issued a further oral hearing will be scheduled as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be informed



when arrangements for the oral hearing have been completed.

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.

### **JobPath Data**

185. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the target set by his Department for JobPath in the number of long-term unemployed it is expected to place in employment annually; the target set for the local employment service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24863/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the deputy will be aware, the State's Public Employment Service is managed by my Department and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies, such as JobPath, Local Employment Service and Job Club providers. The Department has contracts in place with in excess of 60 companies for the provision of these services. This includes two contracts for the provision of the JobPath service and 22 contracts for the provision of the Local Employment Service (LES).

The JobPath Request for Tender set out the percentage of clients referred to the service that the Department expected the service providers to place into employment, based on historic progression to employment rates of each of the referral groups in respect of each contract area (i.e. the 'counterfactual rate'). The expected performance, known as the reference performance rate, set out in the RFT was set at between 60% and 70% above the counterfactual rate, depending on the client group's duration of unemployment. The Department also set a minimum performance rate, below which the Department would not accept bids. This was set at 30% above the counterfactual rate.

Based on this information, tenderers were invited to submit performance offers as part of their bids. The performance offers made in the bids form part of the JobPath service providers' contracts with the department and as such it is not intended to publish same.

I can however confirm that no JobPath providers bid below the reference performance level i.e. below the 60% - 70% above the counterfactual rate as set out in the JobPath request for tender. Full details of the approach taken are contained in the request for tender which is available on the department's website.

The JobPath service has been designed to support the long term unemployed (and those most at risk of becoming long term unemployed) to obtain and sustain employment in the open labour market. The service is being delivered on a payment by results model with all upfront costs of the service being borne by the companies themselves. Jobseekers engage with the JobPath service for 12 months, but can expect to receive in employment support and assistance from the service for a minimum of three months (and up to a maximum of 12 months) when they enter employment.

Payments to contractors are geared towards sustained employment outcomes achieved; contractors are paid for each 13 week period of full time employment (of 30 hours per week) that former Jobseekers successfully complete, up to a maximum of four such payments. In addition a payment is only made were the former jobseeker was not in receipt of a Jobseeker related

income support payment from the department during the 13 week period.

The contracts for the provision of the local employment service (LES) set out the requirements of the service to be delivered and the capacity required from the contractors. Jobseekers engage with the LES service for 12 months and may receive in employment support and assistance from the service when they enter employment. Contractors aim to place 30% of those jobseekers who complete their engagement period with the service into employment (of 30 hours per week).

The clients with whom the local employment service engage fall into two broad groupings - those clients activated/referred by the department for support and assistance and jobseekers who engage directly with the service themselves (this group may include people with a disability, lone parents, early school leavers, qualified adults, ex-offenders, members of the travelling community and refugees).

Payments to contractors are made based on this contract for services model, with the department fully funding the cost of the service in any given location.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Data**

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for social welfare assistance successfully appealed in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24865/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The number of social welfare appeals determined with a favourable outcome for appellants from 2014 to date in 2017 is outlined in the table below.

Overall, 56.5% of the 31,211 appeals which were finalised in 2014 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, i.e. were either allowed in full or in part, or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person. 58.8% of the 25,406 appeals finalised in 2015 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, as did 59.2% of the 23,220 appeals finalised in 2016 and 57.2% of the 6,346 appeals finalised to date in 2017.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was wrong.

Where additional evidence is provided in support of an appeal, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This was the case in some 30% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2014, some 35% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2015, some 37% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2016 and some 39% to date in 2017. Where the decision is not revised in the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence may be provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds. In addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at an oral hearing which may also influence the outcome of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Favourable Appeal Outcomes 2014 - 2017

Year	Revised Deciding Officers Decisions	Allowed by Appeals Officer	Partly Allowed by Appeals Officer	Total Favourable Decisions
2014	5,306	11,327	1,003	17,636
2015	5,200	8,939	807	14,946
2016	5,100	7,871	783	13,754
2017 (to date in 2017)	1,415	2,002	212	3,629

### State Pensions

187. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24878/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition), which had been available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years. This is the current State pension age. It will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to the new State pension age. In such cases, they will not be eligible to claim Jobseekers payments, as they will be in employment. Where this is not possible, but they are still jobseekers, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday, provided they are entitled to that payment. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age. The requirement to be genuinely seeking work remains, however, and if someone has voluntarily retired aged 65, or at a younger age, and is not seeking work, they are not entitled to Jobseekers benefits.

Reversing the abolition of State pension (transition) would have a significant Exchequer cost. In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension. However, it is estimated that well over half of the gross cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million, and this is expected to increase over time. The cost of reversing this decision would depend, therefore, on the effective date of such a measure, and also on any resultant changes in behaviour.

Each year more people are living to pension age and living longer in retirement. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision, and demographic change alone is expected to increase spending on pensions by over €220 million this year, not including the impact of rate increases.

The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustain-

able in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital if current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI on a Pay-As-You-Go basis, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age. Rowing back on these changes, which have already been legislated for, would undermine that sustainability to the detriment of current workers.

It should also be borne in mind that these changes are modest in the context of increasing longevity among older people, and the duration of the average pension is still expected to increase based on current trends.

There is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

Of course workers who do not wish to continue working may retire before they reach the State pension age. However, they will not be entitled to a State pension until they reach state pension age, and if they are not genuinely available for work, they will not be eligible for Job-seekers benefit. This is the case whether they are aged 65 or younger.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

188. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Social Protection when disability allowance payment will commence for a person (details supplied) who has been approved on appeal from April 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24911/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Following a successful appeal, the person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 15 June 2016. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 31 May 2017.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Exceptional Needs Payment Applications**

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); the progress in this case to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24963/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The person concerned made an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment towards funeral expenses. Following an examination of the application and all supporting documentation a decision was made to refuse the application; a written notification of this refusal issued to the person concerned on the 7th of April. The basis for the refusal was that the person concerned was deemed to have sufficient resources available to them, over and above the weekly rate of Supplementary Welfare Allow-

ance applicable to their circumstances, to meet the expense incurred.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals**

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding the refusal of a domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24978/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 1st September 2016. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on 8th December 2016 outlining the decision.

A request for a review of this decision was received on 22nd February 2017 and additional information has been supplied. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The lady concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed. Such reviews can take up to 16 weeks to complete at present.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

191. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24997/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 16 February 2017.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused as she was deemed to have means in excess of the statutory limit for her circumstances. She was notified in writing of this decision on 23 May 2017 and of her rights of review and appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding carer's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25045/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to a person who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

The Department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement.



Following a review, it was determined that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 21 February 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. The person concerned was notified on 28 March 2017 that her payment would cease on 26 April 2017, the reasons why and of her right of appeal.

No appeal has been lodged in this case to date. The person concerned requested a review of the decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application on 18 May 2017.

The review is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility**

193. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a pension claim will be reviewed for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25046/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** To be eligible for state pension (contributory) under current social welfare legislation an applicant must:

- have entered insurable employment before attaining the age of 56 years;
- have at least 520 full rate paid contributions since entry into insurance;
- for a maximum rate pension, have a yearly average of 48 paid and/or credited contributions from 1979, or from the applicant's date of entry into insurable employment to the end of the last complete tax year preceding their 66th birthday, or,
- for a reduced rate pension, have a yearly average of at least 10 paid and/or credited contributions recorded from 1953, or from the applicant's date of entry into insurable employment (whichever is the later) to the end of the tax year preceding their 66th birthday.

According to the records of the Department, the person concerned has a total of 1,767 reckonable paid and credited contributions from 9 June 1969 (date the person entered into insurable employment) to the end of December 2016 (the last complete contribution year prior to the person reaching age 66). This gives the person a yearly average of 36 and an entitlement to €214.20 state pension (contributory) per week, effective from 11th May 2017. The person concerned was notified of this decision on 4th May 2017, together with their right to appeal the decision.

The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994, to make qualification for state pension (contributory) easier for claimants who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme allows a period of up to 20 years (from 1994) spent caring for children under 12 years of age or an incapacitated person(s) to be disregarded when state pension (contributory) eligibility is being assessed. The effect of this is to reduce the number of years by which the person's contributions are divided, thereby increasing their yearly average, and making it easier for them to qualify for pension, or where qualified, to receive a higher rate of entitlement. In the case of the person concerned, it is not possible to apply the homemakers disregard as the period spent caring preceded 1994.

It is open to the person concerned to apply for state pension (non-contributory). This is a means tested pension, also payable from age 66. I have arranged for an application form to be issued to the person concerned. On receipt of a completed form, the person's entitlement to state pension (non-contributory) will be assessed and the person will be notified of the outcome without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Office of Public Works Properties**

194. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works, OPW, plans to open the medieval Barbican to the public in view of the local authority's decision to close Laurence's Gate in Drogheda to traffic; the cost of making the gate safe for access by the public; the timeframe for the opening of the gate to the public; if the OPW will provide personnel at the site in Drogheda to allow for public access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24830/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** St. Laurence's Gate has been opened to the public on particular occasions such as Heritage Week and has proved most popular. However, primarily due to resourcing issues, there are no immediate plans to open the Gate more regularly. Nevertheless, the Office of Public Works will actively engage with the Local Authority to find ways to facilitate more extensive public access for the future. It will also consider introducing a visitor access model with voluntary local input if suitable partners can be identified.

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund**

195. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the new Caranua premises are owned or leased by the OPW, Office of Public Works; the nature of the lease in question between the OPW and Caranua or the OPW and another party but under which Caranua will be allowed to use the premises; the amount of rent that Caranua will pay annually; if Caranua has paid rent to the OPW since its foundation in 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, if so, the amount of same and the nature of that lease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24869/17]

196. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of the lease at a location (details supplied); the terms, rent payable and duration of same between the OPW and Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24870/17]

197. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the nature of the arrangement, lease or other agreement at a location (details supplied) between his Department and the Department of Education and Skills; if rent is paid; and if so, the details of same. [24871/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

In 2013, the Commissioners of Public Works were asked by the Department of Education and Skills to provide office accommodation for CARANUA on the basis that CARANUA would meet the appropriate rental costs. The Commissioners provided CARANUA with space in 24/27 North Frederick Street, Dublin 1 (a building leased by the Commissioners). The lease

on Frederick Court is between the Commissioners of Public Works and the Landlord.

Rent was not paid by CARANUA for its occupation of Frederick Court for the period since its foundation in 2013 to 31 May 2016. It was subsequently agreed with CARANUA that it would pay rent on Frederick Court commencing 1 June 2016 in the amount of €106,000 per annum. The first instalment has been received with the second instalment expected shortly. This arrangement was dealt with by way of a simple agreement between the Commissioners of Public Works and CARANUA.

As the lease on Frederick Court is expiring, it will be necessary to vacate that premises. The Commissioners of Public Works have offered CARANUA space in newly leased premises on James Joyce Street, Dublin 1. The lease is being taken by the Commissioners of Public Works for use by another State agency and CARANUA are being offered accommodation in the building. This will be dealt with by way of a simple agreement between the Commissioners of Public Works and CARANUA. The amount of rent due to be paid by CARANUA for the new office accommodation amounts to €188,589.55 plus VAT per annum. This increased rent arises from the provision of a larger area of accommodation to CARANUA.

It is the remit of the Commissioners to provide accommodation for Government Departments and certain agencies. The Commissioners are funded by the Exchequer to meet the rental costs that arise in the provision of leased accommodation for these. Accordingly, the Department of Education and Skills does not pay rent for its accommodation in Frederick Court.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

198. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress to date on the implementation of Labour Court recommendation No. 19293 for pension claims for community employment supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24901/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The High Level Working Group on the Community Sector was established to give consideration, inter alia, to the matters raised by the Deputy. The Group last met on 7 April and was briefed on a comprehensive scoping exercise that will get underway over the coming months.

The position has always been that FÁS or the Department of Social Protection is not the employer and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme to employees of private companies even if those companies are, or were, reliant on State funding. In considering the matter, I must have regard to costs and the precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

199. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when a scheme of financial assistance and tax incentives will be introduced to assist the upgrading of accommodation in towns and villages to provide housing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24914/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23rd January, contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's

rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential. I launched an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 13th April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. Funding of €20 million has been made available under the scheme, which will support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 15 months.

I will separately launch a pilot scheme in the second half of this year to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot will examine ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. The scheme will be aimed at owner-occupiers.

Details of the scheme are being finalised in consultation with relevant Departments and full particulars will be announced when the pilot scheme is launched later in the year.

### **Commemorative Medals**

200. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason no members of the fire services received commemorative 1916 to 2016 medals; the reason non-rostered and support staff within the ambulance service also did not receive medals; her plans to ensure these members of the emergency services receive these medals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24983/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The presentation of medals for participation in the 1916 commemorations was a matter for the services concerned and/or their sponsoring Departments. My Department has no role in relation to the local authority fire and rescue services or the ambulance services.

### **Registration of Deaths**

201. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding death registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24812/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have forwarded your question to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Medical Card Applications**

202. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a medical card application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24824/17]

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

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Ser-

vices scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

203. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children eligible for the free under six years of age general practitioners scheme by county; the number of general practitioners that are signed up to the scheme, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24825/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The introduction of GP care without fees to children under 6 years of age in July 2015 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.

2,353 GPs hold contracts with the HSE for the provision of general practitioner services to children under 6 and 363,377 children under 6 have access to GP care without fees through a medical card or GP visit card as at 1 May 2017. This represents approximately 90% of the under 6 population, according to the latest census information available from the CSO for this age cohort.

As a breakdown of the information requested by county is not routinely collected by my Department, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

204. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff working in the counties Kildare and Wicklow mental health team; the per capita spend on mental health in County Kildare in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24826/17]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme Data**

205. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the uptake in the HPV vaccine by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24827/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Vaccination Programme Data**



206. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the uptake in MMR booster vaccines in junior infants by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24828/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Vaccination Programme Data**

207. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the uptake in four-in-one booster vaccines in junior infants by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24829/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Obesity Strategy**

208. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that estimated cost of obesity-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes and premature deaths here is in the region of €4 billion annually; if the cost of treatments such as gastric surgery for obese patients with diabetes, approximately €10,000 per patient, are recouped within three years of surgery from a reduction in direct healthcare costs; his plans for the provision of services in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24851/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Obesity Strategy**

209. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated annual cost to the health care system in terms of hospital care and medications of those living with obesity; and if his Department have carried out a cost benefit analysis of the wider implementation of obesity treatment programmes versus current long term spending on obesity-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity-related cancers and heart disease. [24852/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** The annual cost of adult obesity has been estimated at €1.13 billion by a safefood study carried out in 2009. A study on childhood obesity costs is underway by Safefood and we await the results of this study.

### **Medical Register Administration**

210. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of non-specialist doctors not on the Medical Council's specialist register appointed to consultant positions, temporary or otherwise; the duration for which they have been operating in that consultancy position; and the number of times they have been appointed to such a post in tabular form. [24853/17]

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

### **Hospitals Car Park Charges**

211. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that was responsible for the transfer of hospital car parks to private parking management companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24854/17]

212. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that is responsible for the service level agreements between private parking management companies and public hospitals for the maintenance and upkeep of hospital carparks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24855/17]

213. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will supply a copy of the service level agreements between private parking management companies and public hospitals for the maintenance and upkeep of hospital carparks. [24856/17]

214. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount of revenue collected from charging for parking in public hospital carparks; and the amount of that revenue that goes to the hospital, in tabular form. [24857/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 to 214, inclusive, together.

There is a significant demand for car parking at all hospitals. Consequently, the efficient management of parking spaces and traffic flow on hospital campuses is of crucial importance. This is to ensure on-going availability of parking spaces; free flow of traffic on campus; unobstructed access for emergency vehicles at all times; proper use of spaces designated for drivers with disabled permits; and proper use of spaces designated as drop off points near the hospital entrance.

The HSE (Health Service Executive) has advised that it does not have one single contract to provide parking services at all hospitals. Instead each hospital has a unique arrangement which reflects its specific circumstances.

Arrangements for car parking generally is an operational matter for the HSE. The HSE has advised that it does not provide guidelines on hospital parking and each hospital/hospital group implements their own guidelines.

Hospitals which charge parking fees are very cognisant of the financial implications of parking costs for patients and their families particularly those with long-term illnesses. Consequently, a maximum daily fixed parking charge has been introduced in some hospitals, thus capping this expense. I understand that some hospitals also provide reduced rate parking rates for long-term patients and visitors for whom the payment of the full rate would cause hardship. The HSE has advised me that it keeps hospital parking charges under review.

In response to the particular queries raised, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

24 May 2017

215. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE in County Kerry plan to recruit additional community nurses in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24858/17]

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

### Hospital Records

216. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the dates of death and ages of all deceased persons in a community hospital (details supplied) for whom the former health board and HSE have purchased graves and arranged burials in a cemetery since it opened. [24861/17]

**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.

### Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

217. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a fair deal scheme application for a person (details supplied). [24866/17]

**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.

### Medical Card Applications

218. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card application by persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24867/17]

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

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

### Health Services Provision

219. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the development of the satellite dialysis unit in County Wexford; and when the unit will be completed and operational. [24868/17]

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

### **Patient Data**

220. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of all medical outpatient activity which related to the care of skin disease (details supplied) in each of the years 2006 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24886/17]

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

### **Health Services Staff Data**

221. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant dermatologists per head of population here; the way this figure compares with Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24887/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) National Clinical Programme for Dermatology have advised that there are currently 43 WTE Dermatologists.

The Deputy may wish to note that the National Clinical Programme for Dermatology has been established. The aim of the programme is to support high quality, efficient and evidenced based dermatology services delivered in a timely manner and close to, those who need it. The programme is collaborating with the Out-Patient Service Performance Improvement Programme to develop pathways and support sustainable solutions to waiting list for dermatology services. The National Clinical Programme for Dermatology is currently working towards the development of a Model of Care for Dermatology.

### **Patient Data**

222. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of referrals and the number of persons referred to a consultant dermatologist in each of the years 2006 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24888/17]

**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.

### **National Treatment Purchase Fund Data**

223. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an annual breakdown of the NTPF, National Treatment Purchase Fund, funding that has been required in each of the years 2006 to 2016 in order to purchase consultations or treatments for long waiting patients referred to public dermatology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24889/17]

224. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients initially referred to public dermatology services for which the NTPF subsequently purchased consulta-

tions or treatments in each of the years year 2006 to 2016; if such appointments were offered here, in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales or elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24890/17]

225. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons initially referred to public dermatology services and for which the NTPF subsequently purchased consultations or treatments; the number of such appointments which were accepted by persons in each of the years 2006 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24891/17]

226. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons subsequently referred back to primary or secondary care for ongoing care in relation to the number of persons initially referred to public dermatology services and for which the NTPF subsequently purchased consultations or treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24892/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 to 226, inclusive, together.

In response to these particular queries raised, I have asked the NTPF to provide the specific details and I will forward these on to the deputy when they are received.

### **Disease Management**

227. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 14 December 2016, the status of the work of the Lyme borreliosis sub-committee; the number of times this sub-committee has met since its foundation; the details of the research that has been carried out by the sub committee; the details of its membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24893/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (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.

As the work of the subcommittee is coordinated by the HPSC, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

228. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for a person in County Meath to access a psychiatric consultant. [24896/17]



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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

229. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if it is common practice for a person who has presented to a hospital experiencing a mental health crisis to be sent home despite having a general practitioner's referral; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24897/17]

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

### **Hospital Procedures**

230. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether serious flaws exist within the hospital system for persons that present with mental health difficulties. [24898/17]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

231. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting time for cataract removal procedures at Galway University Hospital from 24 to 30 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24902/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I acknowledge that Ophthalmology waiting times are often unacceptably long and 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. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF to dedicate €5m to a daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2,000 daycases will be managed through this process and patients have started to receive appointments and procedures. Long-waiting Ophthalmology patients are a core group who will receive treatment under this initiative.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. These plans have now been finalised and will be communicated shortly.

The HSE is currently finalising the Report of the Primary Care Eye Services Review, which aims to reorganise primary eye-care services with an increased emphasis on maximising delivery of a comprehensive service in primary care, thereby creating capacity in hospitals to provide more complex ophthalmology services.

### **Health Services Provision**

232. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person who resides in County Waterford and has type 1 diabetes cannot access a life-changing course (details supplied) being held in County Kilkenny rather than having to attend the course in County Dublin which is too costly and inconvenient for the person. [24915/17]

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

### **Health Services Provision**

233. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an emergency appointment for a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24916/17]

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

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

### **Hospital Consultant Recruitment**

234. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the consultant post for the Waterford centre of excellence will be filled under the model of care for children and young persons with type 1 diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24917/17]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

235. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24919/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

### **National Drugs Strategy**

236. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns raised by an organisation (details supplied) regarding the new national drugs strategy; if he will address the concerns with regard to the role of alcohol within the strategy, the failure to target marginalised communities, the decision to remove the young persons' facilities and services fund, the lack of an appropriate implementation structure, the lack of recognition of community drug projects or community participation and the absence of references to specific communities of interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24961/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the Deputy will be aware, a Steering Committee with an independent chair has been established to advise me on the development of the new National Drugs Strategy. The Committee has been mandated to develop an integrated public health approach to substance misuse, which is defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illegal drugs.

I understand that the Steering Committee is continuing with its deliberations and a meeting to discuss outstanding issues relating to the final draft report is arranged for the 25 May 2017. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter until the Steering Committee has concluded its work.

### **HIQA Inspections**

237. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if approval will be given to grant an extension on the two week HIQA closure order to allow staff of an organisation (details supplied) sufficient time to ensure all HIQA requirements are met; if approval for funding will be given to facilitate employment of required qualified persons in line with HIQA recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24969/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Health Act 2007 provided for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), its inspection and regulation of designated centres, and the framework for registration of these designated centres. The Act sets out the provisions for service providers to respond to decisions made by HIQA and to appeal decisions to the District Court if required. There is no provision in the Act for the Minister for Health to intervene in decisions made by HIQA or the District Court in these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, HIQA is a fully independent authority charged with ensuring high-quality and safe care for people using our health and social care services in Ireland. I am assured that HIQA takes a proportionate and measured response to issues arising during the inspection and regulation process, and only takes escalated action where significant concerns are present.

The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is paramount. My Department will remain in close contact with the HSE to ensure that all necessary actions are now taken in respect of the centre in question to ensure that its residents are cared for appropriately.

The issue of any additional funding requirements in this regard is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE and have asked that the Executive reply directly to the Deputy on the matter.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Cork city will have an assessment of need carried out under the Disability Act 2005. [24971/17]

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

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

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist a person (details supplied) in County Cork to secure residential care for their adult daughter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24972/17]

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24985/17]

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

241. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24986/17]

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

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

### **Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation**

242. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an accreditation system and approval body for nutritionists similar to that already in operation for dietitians to ensure standards of practice and skills by those claiming to be nutritionists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24991/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Nutritionists are not currently regulated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The Act provides that the Minister for Health may, under section 4(2), designate a health and social care profession not already designated if he or she considers that it is in the public interest to do so and if specified criteria have been met.

The Department's immediate priority, however, is to establish the regulatory process for the 14 professions already designated and to commence the legislation required to give effect to my recent decision to designate counsellors and psychotherapists for regulation under the Act.

It is proposed that when all the registers have been established the Department will ask CORU to prepare a risk assessment, in terms of public protection, of the principal health and social care professions seeking designation, and to make recommendations concerning options for their possible future regulation.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

243. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24994/17]

**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.



24 May 2017

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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

244. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24999/17]

**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.

### **GLAS Applications**

245. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS, application by a person (details supplied); the reason a decision has not been made to date in view of the fact that they only have ten days to carry out the action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24859/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application under Tranche 3 of GLAS and has been approved into the scheme with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

My Department has contacted the person named to confirm his acceptance into the scheme and informed him to proceed with his GLAS actions. The Scheme approval letter for the person named will issue shortly.

### **GLAS Applications**

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a GLAS application by a person (details supplied) was refused; if he will review same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24903/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person

named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

In 2016 the person named withdrew the action that had elevated his GLAS application to tier 2 for approval into the scheme. In accordance with the Scheme terms and conditions as this was the only Tier 2 action, the non-delivery of the action has resulted in the rejection of the GLAS application.

It is understood that the person named has lodged an appeal with the Agriculture Appeals Office. The person named will be informed in writing of the decision of that office when the appeal has been finalised.

### **Commission for Energy Regulation Staff**

247. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied the staffing resource levels of the Commission for Energy Regulation is sufficient; if there has been a review of the staffing levels; his plans to increase staffing levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24846/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The current staffing levels and grading structure at the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) were agreed early last year following an extensive engagement between the CER, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. There have been no requests to my Department for any additional staff posts since then.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

248. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes in County Cork which were provided with a new broadband connection in 2015 and 2016; the number of homes his Department expects will have access to a new connection in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24996/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

On the 4 April, I signed a commitment agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide

broadband to an additional 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. This figure includes over 25,300 premises in County Cork. Eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period, with an average of 500 premises passed per day. My Department will be monitoring this rollout to ensure that eir meets its obligations under the Agreement. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

In total, over 192,500 of the 267,361 premises in County Cork will be able to access a high speed broadband service through commercial providers by the end of 2018. The remaining c.75,000 premises will be covered by the NBP State Intervention.

Nationally, there were over 50,700 new fixed broadband subscriptions in 2015, and over 50,800 in 2016. This brought the total number of fixed broadband subscriptions to over 1.36m. Further information on this issue is available in ComRegs Quarterly Key Data Report for Q4 2016 which is available at [www.comreg.ie](http://www.comreg.ie).

### **Road Projects Status**

249. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed Narrow Water bridge that will link counties Louth and Down; the details of reference for the planning approval expiry dates; and if he will provide other relevant details on the progress of the project. [24967/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under the Fresh Start Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government agreed to undertake a review of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

The current status of the project is that, as part of the ongoing work by both administrations on the options review, a series of discussions with stakeholders have been held by officials of my Department and the Department for Infrastructure in Northern with stakeholders, most recently on 20 February 2017 in Newry, Co. Down. Following these discussions, I understand that it is intended that the North South Ministerial Council will consider a paper on the options for the project, taking account of key objectives, at its next meeting in Transport sectorial format.

The position in relation to planning permission for the bridge at Narrow Water as previously proposed is a matter for the relevant authorities and my Department has no role in that.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

250. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a club (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; the number of the 2,320 applications it is envisaged will be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24823/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme. All of the 2,320 applications received will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process with allocations not expected until September.

## Swimming Pool Programme Funding

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to open applications for grant aid funding for new swimming pools and refurbishment of existing facilities, in view of the fact they are specifically excluded from the capital sports grants programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24862/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP), which is administered by my Department, provides grant aid to a maximum of €3.8 million to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. There are four projects in the current programme and the priority in 2017 is on progressing these projects to the next stages, as appropriate.

In relation to future funding, last November Minister Ross and I launched a major consultation process for the development of a new Sports Policy. The examination of the responses received is being finalised at present and we expect to present the policy to Government before the summer break. The policy will include a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities and future funding support for swimming pools will be considered in this context.

## Road Tolls

252. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions he has taken or will take to ensure that an organisation (details supplied) will not be subject to toll charges and the related queuing delays that can occur at toll stations throughout the State. [24880/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII, formerly NRA) under Part V of the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015. The Roads Act 1993 sets out the legislative provisions regarding tolling and section 62 of the Act specifies the categories of vehicles which are exempt from the payment of toll charges.

Only ambulance, fire brigade vehicles and vehicles used by members of An Garda Síochána or the Defence Forces, in the performance of their duties as such members, are exempt from the payment of tolls. In that regard, it is important to note that the Irish Coast Guard of this Department, the Royal National Lifeboat Institute, mountain rescue teams and other community-based voluntary emergency services and groups are not exempt from the payment of tolls.

Although voluntary and community organisations such as river and sea rescue provide a valuable service, it is still essential, for the purpose of implementation of a fair and robust system of tolling enforcement, that it is applied equally to all users. It would thus be very difficult to provide an exemption for one voluntary or community organisation and not to another. In addition, making the voluntary and community sector generally exempt from tolls would incur a cost to the Exchequer as the PPP toll operators would have to be reimbursed for losses.

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.

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

### **Fáilte Ireland Staff**

253. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff and personnel employed by Fáilte Ireland by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24881/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** Matters regarding staffing are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

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

### **Vehicle Registration**

254. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review a case (details supplied); if he will provide an explanation for same; and the number of errors of this nature that have been made by the VRT centre to date in 2017. [24884/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Overall responsibility for matters relating to the re-registration of imported vehicles lies with the Revenue Commissioners, a body under the aegis of the Department of Finance. As the issues raised in this Question would be more appropriately addressed to the Minister for Finance, I would advise the Deputy to contact that Department.

### **Driver Test**

255. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driving test can be expedited to facilitate a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who requires a driving licence for work purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24913/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

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

### **Tourism Project Funding**

256. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will develop an inshore marine tourism strategy to support small boats and other inshore marine activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24962/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy.



It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the development of individual strategies to promote marine or other tourism products. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

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

### **Arms Trade**

257. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 51 of 16 May 2017, if she will clarify the fact that the weapons category ML5 is not defined as electronic control devices and components, per the common military list of the European Union published on 21 April 2015, and that the components which fall under the ML5 category include other equipment (details supplied). [24864/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Electronic control devices and components are included under category ML5 of the list referred to by the Deputy.

The EU Common Military List, as published on 21 April 2015, specifies the following as being included under category ML5 -

“Fire control, and related alerting and warning equipment, and related systems, test and alignment and countermeasure equipment, as follows, specially designed for military use, and specially designed components and accessories therefor:

- a. Weapon sights, bombing computers, gun laying equipment and weapon control systems;
- b. Target acquisition, designation, range-finding, surveillance or tracking systems; detection, data fusion, recognition or identification equipment; and sensor integration equipment;
- c. Countermeasure equipment for items specified by ML5.a. or ML5.b.;

Note For the purposes of ML5.c., countermeasure equipment includes detection equipment.

- d. Field test or alignment equipment, specially designed for items specified by ML5.a., ML5.b. or ML5.c.”

All license applications for goods exported under ML5 state the nature and end use of those goods.

### **Brexit Issues**

258. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the level of engagement and the number of occasions in which she has had discussions with her European counterparts since the Brexit referendum in which she has made the case for a declaration of compatibility to be made on state aid to remedy a serious economic disturbance in accordance with Article 107 of the treaty in response to the harmful economic consequences of Brexit on the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24882/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Since the Brexit Referendum, I have attended three meetings of the Competitiveness Council.

While State Aid did not feature on the agenda, in my engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings.

As the Deputy is aware, there is a lot that can be done within the existing State Aid Framework and my Department is taking all necessary steps to ensure that we are in a position to support companies in ways that are compatible with the State aid framework as and when they need that support. Last autumn, officials of my Department initiated discussions with DG Competition to sensitise the Commission to potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result. These discussions continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work in developing targeted supports for businesses impacted by Brexit.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses to mitigate the economic impacts of Brexit on businesses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

### IDA Site Visits

259. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits that have been made to the north Cork area by the IDA in each of the years 2013 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24995/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** IDA Ireland collates its data on site visits on an entire County basis only. In the period referenced, there were 158 IDA-sponsored site visits to County Cork. As the following table shows, there has been a steady growth in the number of visits to Cork over the past four years with an additional nine site visits having taken place in the first three months of 2017.

#### IDA Ireland Site Visits to Cork 2013-2016

Year	Cork
2013	31
2014	30
2015	48
2016	49
Total	158

### Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

260. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will expand the terms of investigation into mother and baby homes to include a home (details supplied) and in particular issues surrounding the illegal and abusive testing of vaccinations at that home. [24848/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Under its terms of reference the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (and certain related Matters) is currently investigating 14 named Mother and Baby Homes and a representative

sample of County Homes.

The list comprises those homes which can clearly be identified as having both:

(i) the primary function of providing sheltered and supervised ante and post-natal facilities to single mothers and their children, which included both board and lodgings; and

(ii) an ethos which those running the institutions considered to promote a regime of work, training or education as part of an overall approach to either rehabilitating single mothers before they left the institution, or to give them training for living independently.

The information available about the institution in question does not indicate that it meets these criteria.

In its Second Interim Report, the Commission did not make any recommendations regarding an extension of their terms of reference at the present time. The Commission stated that it was satisfied that the institutions it is investigating are 'unquestionably' the main such homes that existed during the 20th century and that it does not currently recommend that other institutions be investigated. In its report the Commission commits to including relevant information on other institutions which have come to its attention in its social history report which will form a key part of its final report. At this future point, the report notes that the Commission may also be in a position to comment on the need for any further investigations in respect of these institutions.

I am conscious that the Commission's terms of reference already include mechanisms to ensure that any additional matters which the Commission may deem to warrant investigation can be brought to the attention of Government and Government would consider any such recommendations.

While the report states that the commission is not seeking an extension to its current remit, I have indicated that I want to conduct a scoping review to consider if broader terms of reference would help answer some of the questions which have been raised again in public debate. In this context it is useful to remind ourselves that many of the additional issues being raised again in public discourse were examined when the commission was being established. While I am open to examining the calls for an extension, it is essential that we do so with a full understanding of the considerable breadth and scope of its current terms of reference.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

261. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress which has been made in conducting an independent review on the cost of providing quality child care in private and community settings consistent with the principles of ongoing professionalisation of the sector; the factors which will be considered in the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24872/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Given the importance of financial sustainability for the provision of quality childcare, the Irish Programme for Government commits to conducting and publishing an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in Ireland. This commitment aligns closely with work on the design and development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme and is currently being progressed in that context. Work on preparing a Request for Tenders (RFT) for this 'Independent Review of Cost' is currently underway and it is envisaged that this RFT will be published in the coming months.

The Independent Review on the Cost of Providing Quality Childcare will, among other things, examine the link between wages, the quality of provision, and public funding. Its conclusion will be of great assistance to my Department as we consider the policy tools available to us to address the issues of wages and working conditions.

Issues that the review may consider include (1) the total average cost of quality childcare provision, (2) variation in cost and the reasons for same, (3) the link between cost and quality, (4) the cost of providing childcare services in disadvantaged communities and (5) the likely impact of future cost pressures, including the ongoing professionalisation of the sector.

€19m extra for families from September to the end of the year is a good start. But more must be done if we are truly to have affordable accessible quality childcare. In the negotiations for Budget 2018 I will be asking for extra funding so we can address some of the issues raised by childcare practitioners. It is clear more funding is needed so we can continue our radical new approach that improves both affordability and quality simultaneously.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

262. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which the universal child care scheme will be administered from September 2017; if the existing platform will be used; when providers will be given detailed information on the way in which the scheme will operate in practice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24873/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As I have previously announced, the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) will not be introduced in September 2017, but will be introduced at the earliest possible date.

However, I do not want to delay the benefit of higher childcare subsidies for families. I am pleased to confirm that major improvements in childcare subsidies will therefore come into effect this September, including increases of up to 50% in targeted childcare subsidy rates and a new universal childcare subsidy for children aged between 6 months and 36 months. September’s changes will be delivered through existing childcare schemes, pending the introduction of the ACS.

Childcare subsidies will be provided directly to Tusla-registered childcare providers. All Tusla-registered childcare providers, community and private, can sign up to provide these schemes, ensuring accessibility throughout the country in a range of services to suit the needs of parents.

Childcare subsidies will be administered using the Programme Implementation Platform (PIP); a system that childcare providers are familiar with through the delivery of the ECCE (free pre-school) programme and existing targeted schemes supported by my Department. In the case of the universal childcare subsidy, parents must provide both the child and parent PPS number to their childcare provider to qualify.

In order to raise awareness among both childcare providers and parents, I promised a comprehensive public information campaign before the end of May. I am delighted to report that over this week each childcare provider in the country will receive an information pack on the changes to the schemes I have just outlined. In addition City/County Childcare Committees have been briefed in order to offer local support to childcare providers; a dedicated website has been launched ([affordablechildcare.ie](http://affordablechildcare.ie)) and officials from the DCYA will shortly commence a series of information events throughout the country.

## Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

263. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some preschools and child care providers are having difficulty with the online application forms for EYC and after-school grants recently announced; if her Department and Pobal will engage with the sector as soon as possible to ensure that difficulties are addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24874/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In 2017, I made €4m in funding available under the Early Years Capital Programme and a separate €3 million in capital funding for services providing school age childcare. The application process for both funds has now closed. Pobal is responsible for administering capital programmes on behalf of my Department. In addition to providing the online application system, Pobal support the application process with a range of dedicated materials including application guidelines, user videos and a dedicated client services helpdesk. In addition, County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are available to support childcare providers at a local level.

Pobal has advised my Department that approximately \*1,800 applications across both capital programmes have been submitted and assured my officials that the application process was satisfactory from a technical and applicant support perspective. In particular, with regard to the IT system, the system did not experience downtime throughout the duration of the application process and no issues presented with how the IT system was operating and processing applications.

As with all funding programmes a deadline is required for receipt of applications. Late applications are not accepted, in fairness to more than 1,800 applicants who made their applications on time.

Pobal are dealing with a small number of complaints in relation to programme design and one in relation to a late application. All complaints are dealt with under Pobal’s complaint procedure detailed on the Pobal website.

*\*tentative figure and subject to change.*

## Child Care Qualifications

264. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will re-examine the 2016 child care regulation requirements whereby only persons who are qualified with a major level 5 in early childhood care and education can be included in adult child ratios. [24979/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The majority of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into effect on 30th June 2016.

The Regulations provide that each employee working directly with children attending the service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The Regulations clearly state that the service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard.



24 May 2017

This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for services registering after that date and for all other services on 31st December 2016.

My Department introduced this regulatory change following many years consultation with the sector. Mindful of the challenge that it would present to the sector, my Department introduced the following supportive measures:

- Learner Funds to provide sector workers with an opportunity to upskill to a Level 5 qualification.
- In 2017, my Department made funding available to provide a bursary to childcare staff who have undertaken higher level courses at their own expense.
- The Regulations provide an exemption up to 1st September 2021 for certain existing childcare staff who intend to retire from the sector in the near future, do not hold the minimum qualification and who do not wish to undertake a course of training at this stage. This option was first publicised through the City / County Childcare Committees in 2014. The deadline for availing of this exemption was 30 June 2016.
- Considerable lead-in time was given, during which the sector was aware that a minimum qualification requirement was going to be introduced.

The recently published Country Specific Recommendations 2017 state that ‘Ireland should enhance social infrastructure...including quality childcare’. The minimum qualification requirement contained in the Regulations has an important role to play with regard to ensuring the provision of quality childcare by centre based childcare providers. Consequently, I have no plans to amend the Regulations.

### **Child Care Services Regulation**

265. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to implement the proposals which have been put forward by a group (details supplied) in a submission relating to the 2016 child care regulation requirements. [24980/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The majority of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into effect on 30th June 2016.

The Regulations provide that each employee working directly with children attending the service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The Regulations clearly state that the service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard.

This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for services registering after that date and for all other services on 31st December 2016.

In light of the implementation of the Childcare Regulations, from December 31 2016, Community Employment Scheme participants working in childcare services who do not have relevant childcare qualifications can no longer count towards the ratio of staff to children required.

The Department is aware that some community/not-for-profit services have relied on Community Employment workers as a core component of their business model. The Department commissioned Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI) to investigate the extent of likely issues and

to work with community childcare services to minimise the impact of this change.

As of end 2016, 201 Community Services had undertaken a review. Of these, CCI have indicated that 60 are likely to be significantly impacted by the qualifications requirement. The Department has indicated that funding may be available to assist these services, and is currently considering proposals in this regard.

CCI, with the approval of the Early Years Unit of the Department, have developed a business planning/cost analysis template and is continuing to work with services to identify a sustainable path forward, incorporating the cost of staff to replace CE scheme workers, based on a 'cost per FTE child' analysis.

The recently published Country Specific Recommendations 2017 state that 'Ireland should enhance social infrastructure....including quality childcare'. The minimum qualification requirement contained in the Regulations has an important role to play with regard to ensuring the provision of quality childcare by centre based childcare providers. Consequently, I have no plans to amend the Regulations.

### **Air Corps**

266. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a military police investigation has been commenced to ascertain under whose orders documentation of Air Corps air quality tests were destroyed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24894/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As I indicated to the Deputy in my letter of 17 May 2017, an extensive search was undertaken by the military authorities to locate the two reports compiled by Forbairt in 1995 and 1997. The military authorities also consulted with Enterprise Ireland (which superseded Forbairt). However, it has not been possible to locate the reports. I am advised by the military authorities that there are no plans to carry out an investigation into why these reports cannot be located.

### **Air Corps**

267. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a military police investigation has commenced to ascertain whether the failure to maintain health and safety standards and the subsequent illnesses caused to staff of the Air Corps breached military law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24895/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As I indicated in my responses to other recent Parliamentary Questions on this issue, a small number of former and serving Air Corps personnel are suing the Minister for Defence alleging personal injuries arising from exposure to workplace chemicals. You will appreciate that given that these matters are subject to litigation, I am constrained in relation to commenting.

However, I am advised by the military authorities that there is no military police investigation into this matter. The statutory authority for dealing with health and safety matters in the workplace is the Health and Safety Authority.

The Deputy will be aware that following a number of inspections at the Air Corps premises at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, in 2016, the Health and Safety Authority issued a report of inspection with a number of general improvements and recommendations for follow up. The

Air Corps committed to addressing these recommendations as part of an eight phase improvement plan. The military authorities have advised me that six of the eight phases have now been fully completed and a further phase is progressing well and will be completed shortly. The final phase is a continuous ongoing process.

You will also be aware that in September 2016 I appointed an independent third party to review allegations made in a number of protected disclosures relating to health and safety issues in the Air Corps which were received in late 2015 and early 2016. Once a final review is to hand, I will determine any further steps required and ensure that all recommendations, whether arising from the work of the Health and Safety Authority or the ongoing protected disclosure review, will be acted upon to ensure the safety of the men and women of the Air Corps.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

268. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he plans to improve the pay and conditions of the Defence Forces personnel whose families have been reliant on the family income supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24899/17]

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

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

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

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

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

### **Defence Forces Personnel**

269. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will address the findings of the Public Service Pay Commission's report published in May 2017 which found that there are issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of members of the Defence

Forces, especially among aviation personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24900/17]

270. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to counter the discharge rates among Defence Forces personnel which have risen due to better remuneration rates within the private sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24904/17]

271. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to enhance career progression, job satisfaction and professional development within the Defence Forces which may be linked to current exit levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24905/17]

272. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he plans to address working conditions within public services which the pay commission recommended should be addressed by the provision of an appropriate mechanism; with specific reference to the Defence Forces and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24906/17]